

cortisol

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by [angelbeachcat](#)

Summary

Dream and George, best friends and partners at a private national security organization try to keep their work life separated from their friendship. They're a remarkable team; George is a quick thinker and good on his feet, and Dream is the strongest and fastest person the world has to offer. The problem is that Dream has no regard for his own safety, and George is madly in love with him.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Days like this, George wonders why he fucking bothers.

He could have gone and got his Doctorate. He contemplates packing his bags and heading back to New York to complete his education, and never having to see this hellhole again.

Better idea; he's going to frame his degrees right above his desk, so everyone is forced to look at them whenever they want to have a conversation with him in his office. He's going to save Dream's ass, again, sit him down in the chair in front of him, and remind him that at any given point, George is qualified to walk away. Then, he's going to track down the CEO of this fucking organization, and demand a twenty percent increase in salary *and* a better health insurance package because at this rate he's going to have multiple heart conditions before he turns thirty.

Right now though, he's slamming down on his keyboard and yelling furiously into the headset.

"Being louder doesn't make you sound any clearer, y'know," Dream's voice offers helpfully through the speakers.

"I apologize," George says while gritting his teeth. "I'm a little high strung at the moment, because I'm trying to make sure you don't get fucking *killed!*"

"Relax, George," Dream responds, and it drives George crazy when he doesn't act according to the gravity of the situation.

The truth is that George is never going to up and leave, and Dream knows it, which is why he thinks he can get away with acting so ridiculously cocky all the time.

"Sapnap's coming to get you, get to Gate Nine," George instructs. "Don't do anything stupid, Dream."

"If by anything stupid, you mean—"

"Dream, this is an order," George states firmly. "I'll write you up if you try anything funny."

"C'mon George—"

"That's *Sergeant* to you right now," George says back firmly. "I fucking mean it. Don't try anything, get to Gate Nine. Over."

George waits for Dream to mutter out a "yes sir," before switching over to Sapnap's line.

"How far are you?"

"Just a minute down, is he there yet?" Sapnap asks.

George shakes his head no as he speaks even though Sapnap can't see it. "His coordinates are still showing up closer to the Miller Reservoir, it's going to take him ninety four seconds. Keep yourself ready, he's injured and you'll need to take Alternate Route Twelve to get back here."

"Should we head straight to the medical center instead?" Sapnap asks.

“No, he’s coming here, I’m taking care of it myself,” George states firmly. “They’ve got interns in today and they were too fucking slow last time, and I’ll be damned if he dies at the hand of some idiot.”

“You’re right,” Sapnap says. “I think I see him—how are his vitals?”

“Mediocre,” George says back, but his heart sinks when he sees how low Dream’s blood pressure has gotten. “Hurry back, please. Don’t yell at him or anything. We’ll do that once we’re sure he’s alive.”

“Copy, over,” Sapnap finally says before cutting the line.

George watches as the dot on his map labelled Dream finally meets with the one labelled Sapnap. He gets an alert saying that they’ve started moving towards the head unit.

Fuck you, Dream. Fuck you for never caring about anyone other than yourself.

Thinking it doesn’t make it true. Dream cares about everyone way too much, George just wishes he did it in a way that didn’t put him in danger. If Dream was a little more rational, thought with his brain instead of his heart, maybe he wouldn’t tear George into pieces while he risked his life on any given weekday.

He supposes he wouldn’t really be Dream then; the boy that would sneak onto the campus library to sit with George and do nothing while he studied, the boy he let drag him out to Colorado for this batshit crazy gig.

When Dream had first told George he was telekinetic, George had told him he was delusional. Later on, when Dream told him he had superhuman speed, George had told him to go fuck himself. When Dream had shown him, he had nothing to say. He still doesn’t believe it sometimes. It doesn’t matter what he believes right now though, because Dream could potentially bleed out in the next hour if they didn’t do something.

George buzzes the medical wing and asks for a wheelchair to be sent to Sapnap’s parking spot and the portable standard emergency station to be set up in the back room. Then he sends the coordinates of the warehouse Dream wasn’t supposed to be into the higher ups. Whether he was supposed to do that before he made sure Dream was alright is a detail that nobody needs to know.

Sapnap bursts in, wheeling Dream in at an impressive speed. George would laugh if he wasn’t so fucking worried.

“He’s getting loopy,” Sapnap says. “Where do you want him?”

George gestures towards the back of the room as he rushes to put on his lab coat and gloves.

When he gets to Dream, black skin tight suit ripped along his ribs to reveal charred flesh, he feels bile burn in his throat.

“I need you to get me the special wrap,” George says as his hands work to prevent the fabric from touching the wound.

Dream groans.

“I know, I’m sorry, it’ll be alright, I promise,” George whispers, pushing Dream onto his back with one hand and cutting away at the fabric with the other.

It's far too hasty, but the adrenaline forces him through it. He tries to think of this as any other patient, but he can't when Dream is whimpering his name like that.

"I need you to be quiet for me, okay?" George says, running a hand through Dream's hair in an effort to soothe him.

Dream whines again, and George holds his hand out for Sapnap to drop the bandages.

"The boss said we can't afford to keep going through these at this rate," Sapnap reminds George as he hands them to him. "Isn't there another option?"

"Not one that won't scar," George mutters. "If anyone asks, I fell and used them by accident."

"George," Sapnap starts, but George turns around to glare at him and it's the end of the conversation.

"Well maybe, if he was more careful," George starts bitterly, but Dream lets out a cry of pain and grips George's forearm, looking up at him with glittering eyes.

George isn't finishing that thought.

He works to clean the wound, going through half a dozen white-now-crimson towels.

"Get him a painkiller, the ones I keep in the orange bottles, and some water," George instructs, and Sapnap obliges immediately.

"Open up," he instructs Dream, popping two of them into his mouth. "Good, need you to sit up and swallow, try not to move your chest around too much, okay baby?"

The pet name slips out before he can stop it. George can feel Sapnap staring holes into his back.

"Get the mop, *intern*," George tells him.

Sapnap mutters a few curse words in his direction before heading off and retrieving it.

George unravels the aqua blue gauze. It costs a fortune to make, and even more of a fortune to buy. It's the only way Dream will be able to heal a wound that deep in a short period of time. George will cover for Dream a million times over.

"He hasn't lost much blood," George tells Sapnap. "He's just gone into medical shock."

"Fuck," Sapnap says, unable to tear his eyes away from Dream. "He'll be alright though, right George?"

"Yeah," George promises, to Sapnap and mostly himself.

He kneels so he's eye level with the wound. He swallows hard before beginning to wrap it. It's fine. Dream is fine. Dream is a fucking idiot, and if the wound had been just a few milimeters deeper he would have been fucking dead, but he's fine.

"George, it hurts so badly," Dream rasps, propped up against the wall as he sits on the narrow cot. "Make it stop, George."

George bites back the angry feeling at whoever did this because he can't afford to think irrationally right now. He focuses on securing the bandages.

“The doctors are wondering if you need help,” Sapnap calls, and George shakes his head no.

“Tell them I need a custodian in thirty minutes, but to otherwise stay the hell out of my way,” George informs them.

“He’s alright, thank you, could we just get clean-up in thirty?” Sapnap says into the intercom.
“Thank you.”

When George deems the wrapping satisfactory, Sapnap is finally allowed back into his general vicinity.

“Dream? Can you hear me?” George asks.

Dream groans. “I’m hungry.”

“Sapnap—”

“I’m getting him *your* lunch,” Sapnap states pointedly before stepping away.

“Can you believe that guy?” Dream whispers to George. “I’m dying, and he’s thinking about lunch. He doesn’t even care about me.”

George doesn’t respond, just hands Dream a bottle of water. “Drink more.”

Dream opens his mouth to protest, but stops when he sees the anger in George’s eyes. When Sapnap hands George his lunch tupperware, George climbs onto the cot adjacent from Dream, and opens it up.

“It’s rice,” George says, angrily scooping it onto a spoon. “Open up.”

Dream is stupid, but he’s not dumb, so he listens. He lets George feed him the entire container, the only other sound in the workspace Sapnap’s fingers working furiously at the keyboard.

“They managed to get two people at the warehouse,” Sapnap tells George.

“See!” Dream exclaims excitedly. “We managed to—”

“*We* didn’t do shit, Dream,” George says angrily. “You fucking risked all of our necks by going out there, you’ve used up tens of thousands of dollars of medical equipment, and you almost got yourself killed. You know who *did* something today?”

Dream flushes red and slumps down, but George props him back up.

“Don’t slouch, you’ll fuck up the bandages, you idiot,” George hisses. “*Sapnap* did something today. He’s listened to all my commands flawlessly without bitching, despite just being an intern. Without him, you’d be fucking dead. *You* did something really fucking stupid today, Dream.”

“Sapnap’s my friend too, you don’t need to talk down to me,” Dream bites back. “I’m injured, *Sergeant*. You shouldn’t yell at your patients.”

“You’re not my patient,” George reminds him. “I’m doing this to save my own ass. And I don’t give a fuck what anyone in here, including me’s relationship to you is right now. We’re coworkers here, and it’s too dangerous for—”

“So you’re saying we have a *relationship*? ” Dream teases, smiling lopsidedly and George wants to scream and cry and sock him in the face and kiss him at the same time.

“Sapnap, please call in a doctor for him,” George says instead, turning on his heel and walking out.

“George, wait,” he hears Dream call, but George doesn’t stop.

He seethes with every step he takes forward.

↔

George belonged somewhere between above average and motivated on the axis of intelligence. He skipped a grade or two, but nothing remarkable enough to be regarded as a prodigy. He finished his Bachelors of Neuroscience and Honours Bachelors of Artificial Intelligence by the time he was twenty, which is when he had the honour of meeting Dream.

Dream’s father was his mentor and graduate supervisor. He’d believed in George when George didn’t believe in himself. He also, for better or worse, came with an annoying son who had assigned himself the role of George’s best friend without his permission. Regardless of wherever George went, Dream followed, and he eventually ended up growing on him.

When Dream had told him he was getting re-stationed in Denver, George had been heartbroken. Until Dream told him that his dad had pulled some strings, gotten him a part-time research position at University of Colorado, Boulder, and handed him a letter in a mahogany envelope inviting him to work as a member on Dream’s team.

He’d climbed up the ranks in record time, going from an assistant position to a Sergeant, the youngest the organization ever had at the age of twenty four.

Now he’s Dream’s supervisor, technically, which is a painful position to be in for a multitude of reasons.

The first, being that Dream never thinks before he acts, and he believes that his skill is the sole reason he’s been able to get away with it. It drives George mad, because Dream doesn’t have to deal with all the emotional repercussions of seeing his best friend torn to pieces all the time.

George starts making exceptions for Dream behind his back. He’s had to. George’s boss is always confused as to why so much of their budget goes into the medical department, but George’s boss doesn’t sleep next to Dream almost every night. George’s boss doesn’t have to stare at the gash across his shoulder when Dream undresses in front of him, a reminder that George had almost failed to protect him.

Dream pays for his failures through reprimandation. George pays for his failures with, potentially, Dream’s life.

George often wonders why Dream doesn’t just move in, but he doesn’t ask because he doesn’t want to push it. Maybe Dream likes having some space between them. It makes him sad to think about; the boy that used to sneak around in buildings he wasn’t allowed in just to see George before his finals needing space. Bored of him.

Dream used to dig his fingernails into healing wounds while he slept, so George does everything in his power to prevent it from getting to that point.

They have a deal to preserve their friendship. He’s Dream’s boss at work, and Dream’s friend

anywhere else. George does a better job of upholding this than Dream does, but it's the reason they've been able to do what they do. They don't discuss work or personal arguments in inappropriate settings, which would be fine if it wasn't for one sneaky detail.

George is head over heels in love with him.

Dream doesn't seem to give a fuck about his own health and it drives George crazy. So he masks his concern with anger, and he fucks around with Dream and never talks about it. It's better this way for everyone other than George.

"You didn't have to leave me, you dramatic piece of shit," Dream says first thing when he knocks on George's door that evening.

George lets him in. "If you walked here, I'm going to kill you."

"Sapnap dropped me off before his classes started," Dream says with a grin. "Thanks for living so close to the university. He's coming over after his lab is done, by the way, so you're cooking for three."

"Wow, thanks for the heads up," George says sarcastically, watching as Dream makes himself comfortable on the couch.

Dream doesn't even live far away. He has an apartment that's less than a minute away from George if he runs, which is his excuse as to why he doesn't need a car. George is always fussing about how he'll tire himself out, but Dream never wants to hear it.

"I go wherever you go, so if I can get to you I'm alright," Dream had said to him one day.

It doesn't even make sense. George is going to the dealership for him tomorrow, he decides.

Sapnap has a car, and he's the youngest out of all of them, which speaks volumes.

"What are you doing?" Dream asks. "Do you need help?"

"No I don't," George says. "Stay seated. You're not supposed to be moving around until that's healed."

He supposes now is as good of a time as ever to get started on dinner.

"No moving around at all?" Dream calls from the couch. "I can help by—"

"Don't try anything funny right now, don't you dare," George says, pointing a spatula at him. "You need to rest."

Dream groans but compiles.

George watches him while he starts the stove and pours water into a pot. He hears Dream flicking through different titles on Netflix.

"Have we seen *The Hole In The Ground*?" Dream asks. "I remember Sapnap was talking about it."

"We haven't," George says, dropping pasta into the pot. "We'll wait for him to get here before we start it."

"I'm staying over," Dream says. "If you don't mind. My ribs really hurt tonight and I don't want to go home alone."

George bites back a *who's fault is that*, because it's not productive. He pours salt into the pasta water and makes his way to the couch to sit next to Dream instead.

"We have time until he gets here," Dream says, grinning. "We could fuck around a little."

"You still have an hour until your bandages can come off," George points out.

"That's only because you make me keep them on longer than company policy," Dream protests.
"C'mon George. It's all better, look."

Before George can stop him, Dream takes off his shirt and begins to unravel the carefully wrapped gauze.

"Dream, stop," George commands, but it holds no weight here.

The aqua bandages, now a deep purple, come off to reveal no wound, with no scar.

"See? All better," Dream says with a grin. "You worry too much, *Sergeant*."

George feels himself flush red as he goes to sit next to him. "Don't call me that outside of work."

Dream cocks up an eyebrow, smiling the way he always does before he spins George's world the wrong way around. George is going to let him.

"You were so insistent earlier today though," Dream says, reaching out to grab onto the strings of George's hoodie. "What was up with that?"

It's difficult enough to breathe when he's sitting so close to Dream under regular circumstances. He doesn't even understand how he survives afterwards.

Yes he does. He pushes him away.

"Need to check the pasta," George mutters.

"My telekinesis has been acting up lately," Dream continues without missing a beat. "Do you think it has to do with the nuclear plant I visited last month?"

"Why would the nuclear plant change anything?" George asks as he begins to strain the pot.

"Uh, there was a bit of a—I had a bit of a hiccup with one of the boilers, but I fixed it before I left."

George nearly drops the pot to the floor. "And you didn't think to tell anyone until now?"

Dream shrugs. "It's not a big deal."

"Dream, you are *endangering* people," George spits, and that seems to finally garner a reaction, because Dream's shoulders slump. "You've got to stop."

"They had an inspector come in the next day, don't worry," Dream brushes him off. "Everything is fine."

It's not. It's not fine at all.

"Sapnap will be here soon," Dream says as he gets up from the couch, wincing as he does. "I think—I think today has been hard for you. Go take a seat. I'm going to finish the pasta for you."

When Dream refuses to sit back down, George relents and lets him help open the can of sauce. Their fingers brush together as George reaches for the knife and he turns his head away so Dream doesn't see him flush red.

I wish you cared about your own life half as much as you cared about public safety, and your stupid ego, George wants to say. *I wish you cared about me enough to stay out of trouble when you could.*

The doorbell rings.

"Sapnap's here," George says instead.

Chapter End Notes

swear this chapter is making this seem more angsty than this is lol. I tweeted about this concept a month ago and I wrote it and then forgot about it but I'm posting it bc why not. its practically half written i just have a few more things i want to work out so i made it a multi-chapter instead of a one shot.

comments and kudos are appreciated as always!

updates: [twitter @angelbeachcat](https://twitter.com/angelbeachcat)

thank you, and see you in the next one :)

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The money laundering scheme George had been working on unfoiling had ended up being linked to a drug trafficking ring. He was almost certain they were conducting an operation at a warehouse that Thursday. His *first* mistake was giving Dream access to the information in this development.

Dream had promised him he wouldn't try anything until George gave him the green light, and then went ahead and did his own thing anyways. He barged in, with no plan or authority aware of his location. George had noticed that it was quiet, *too* quiet in the office and decided to check on him, when he'd found out that Dream was being chased.

It was a stupid and dangerous thing to do.

George ends up venting to Sapnap a few days later as he marks papers and Sapnap works on his lab.

"It's so fucking frustrating, it's like he doesn't even care about his own life," George groans. "I can't keep covering for him like this. Especially with how dangerous all of this is getting."

Sapnap pats his shoulder sympathetically with one hand, the other still moving across his keyboard. "He's just reckless, you know him."

"He can't be reckless anymore, that's the point," George says as he waved his pen pointedly.
"There's too much on the line."

"Is it really about what's on the line?" Sapnap asks, finally pausing his typing to look at George.
"Or is it about the fact you don't want anything bad to happen to him?"

George flushes pink. "I don't want anything bad to happen to any of the people I work with. And obviously, Dream is my friend. Obviously I don't want him to get hurt. Even though he's a dumbass."

Sapnap looks at George pointedly. "George."

"I don't know what you want me to say," George finally snaps, tossing his pen to the side and taking his head in his hands. "Okay, fuck, whatever, he doesn't care about himself. I wish he cared about me enough to listen."

He hears Sapnap quietly shove his laptop aside and feels him tentatively place a hand on his back. When George doesn't react, he moves it up and down awkwardly in an attempt to comfort.

"Hey, he does care about you," Sapnap says gently. "He—"

"He knows how I feel about him going against my orders, and he doesn't give a fuck," George spits. "I'm trying to get promoted to commander, and this bust going well depends on it. But he—"

George stands from his seat and double checks the lock on his office door. He knows damn well this isn't about the promotion.

"—He has to go off and prove that he's some hero. Great job Dream, your stupid magic hands and

your stupid magic legs managed to pull you out of this one. You saved the day,” George starts as he paces at the back of the room. “Doesn’t give a fuck if he’s *almost* killed ten people that we need alive, because *almost* isn’t dead according to him.”

George angrily sits back down at his desk. “He doesn’t care that me, you, everyone else, is busting their ass to cover his mess.”

Sapnap looks at him pointedly.

George puts aside his rage and takes a deep breath, taking his pen back between his fingers. “Sorry. This was unprofessional.”

“Dude,” Sapnap groans. “Shut up. You’re right though.”

George focuses on helping Sapnap finish his lab, and then begins to make his way home.

He turns the key in the lock, shuts the door gently, and drops his bags with a sigh.

“Hello,” a voice says from behind him as the umbrella by the doorway lifts into the air. George jumps up in alarm.

A laugh. Dream’s laugh.

“Relax, George, just me,” Dream says as George turns to look at him. “Look, telekinesis is all fixed.”

He’s standing there, already in training attire; a dark-black, skintight bodysuit. They’re supposed to calibrate the thermal controls on it today, which normally George would do in the lab, but he’s getting it renovated at the moment so they’ll have to settle for the kitchen. George is able to monitor all his vitals, regulate thermal heat, and track his coordinates in real time almost perfectly because of that suit. One of Dream’s dad’s friends specialized in making them; George wonders if it’s possible to buy them in bulk because Dream ends up ruining them far too often.

“I’m upset with you,” George reminds him as he walks to the couch.

Dream sighs and sits down next to him. “I know. You didn’t even make breakfast for me before you went to your *fake* job.”

“It’s not a fake job,” George reminds him. “I’m here for research too.”

Dream isn’t listening anymore. He raises a hand towards George’s kitchen. George watches as the tendons in Dream’s hands flex as he motions towards himself. A box of cereal lifts itself from the top of a cabinet and flies into Dream’s lap. He examines the box and groans.

“George, really? Whole grain cereal? It’s not even good,” Dream tells him, but he pops open the top of it and sticks his hand in anyways.

Anger burns in George’s chest. “You don’t even care, do you?”

Dream turns to look at him, cheeks stuffed full of cereal. “Care about what?”

“You shouldn’t have been there,” George repeats. “I have a meeting with the boss tomorrow and he’s going to have my head on a platter for it.”

“Just tell him I did it without your permission,” Dream says with a shrug, sticking his hand back into the cereal box.

George yanks it out of his grasp. Dream is taken aback by this, looks at him with wide eyes.
“George—”

“What am I supposed to do if you die next time, Dream?” George asks coldly.

This is the worst discussion ever. He hates it, but it’s his own fault that they’re having it. He’s not supposed to bring up Dream’s actions outside of work, not supposed to complain when they sit down together to have tea only an hour after George literally pulls him from the claws of death. But he supposes the lines are already a little blurred at this point, so what’s a little more?

He can’t stand it.

Being Dream’s boss and being Dream’s friend at the same time is hard enough on its own without the added third dynamic of wanting to keep him in a box so that nothing bad happens to him ever, or love, or whatever it’s called. He can’t let anything happen to Dream. He *won’t*.

His bottom lip trembles so he bites down on it with his teeth hard enough to draw blood.

“I have to do what’s best for everyone, best for the city, you know that,” Dream says gently, putting his hands on George’s shoulders.

That’s the only answer he ever gets. What’s best for everyone.

“No, what you have to do is what I tell you to do,” George says back, weakly trying to remove himself from Dream’s arms. “My job is to worry about you *and* the city. Your job is to listen, now.”

Dream overpowers him, pulling George to his chest. His grip tightens and George is forced to melt into him and he hates it. He hates that this is always the way this conversation ends; with Dream consoling him like he’s some sort of child with no understanding of how this job works.

George knows how this job works.

“That’s just the problem,” Dream mumbles into his hair.

George stops breathing for a moment. “What does that mean?”

Dream sighs. “Nothing.”

George sits up straight. Now he knows it’s definitely not nothing. “Tell me.”

“Well,” Dream hesitates. “You’re great at your job. Seriously. You’re fantastic.”

George raises an eyebrow. “But?”

“It’s just,” Dream hesitates again. “You know, your other teams are super successful.”

“Yes,” George continues, frowning. “Because my other teams listen to what I tell them to do.”

George wonders what Dream is thinking. It isn’t like Dream has particularly poor performance, he just gets sent out on fewer cases nowadays. It makes him antsy, George knows, but ever since he developed the software for spy bugs to intercept secret meetings, there isn’t as much need for Dream to step out and go on smaller stakeouts.

Ideally, Dream would dedicate this extra time to understanding some of the new equipment George is proto-typing, so it could serve as useful for the higher stake missions. Instead, Dream runs off to

do improv with people that want to fucking kill him.

George's other two teams are the best novices in the whole state. They're all relatively young, but they train very quickly. He's hoping to have them promoted to an intermediate squadron by the end of this year.

"George," Dream starts apologetically. "You like— you never send me on any proper missions."

George stares at him for a moment and then blinks. "Yes, because we don't need you doing stakeouts anymore. We have equipment for that."

"You used to send me," Dream starts. "And there's— there's opportunities for you to still send me. But you hold off, and you build your little— the fucking nanobots or whatever they're called, and we lose time. People get away."

"I don't care," George pointedly tells him. "My responsibility is to find the bad guys and to keep you safe."

"No it's not," Dream says as he crosses his arms.

George watches as his jaw clenches for a moment. *He's angry with me.*

"Your job is to find the bad guys, and keep the world safe," Dream says. "And I've been— it's my job too, and I do it well. Sometimes I think you care about me more than you care about actually making sure we get people."

It's because George does.

He doesn't give a fuck how many people get away. He has faith in his abilities and problem solving skills. He knows he can fix any mess he gets himself into. It's selfish and arrogant but he hasn't failed himself once.

"I only have one of you," George says jokingly. "I gotta make sure I— I don't know what you want me to say. Of course I want you safe."

"I didn't ask for you to babysit me," Dream scoffs. "You know I— I've been doing this since I was fifteen years old. I'm the best of the best. You're messing up my numbers."

"Are you serious?" George wants to laugh. "You're gonna sit here and tell me that it's wrong I want to keep you safe and then tell me it's okay for you to risk your life and waste hundreds of thousands of—"

"I don't waste shit, George! Go ask the boss who the two men I caught yesterday were," Dream snaps. "Go ask him— and then ask for what the budget was to catch them, and then tally how much I rack up in medical bills."

"Don't you get it?" George feels himself raising his voice. "You're no use to us if you're dead!"

"But I'm *not* dead!" Dream yells back, yanking the cereal box back from George.

George watches as cheerios fly into the air before they freeze. Dream's arm is out and his eyebrows are furrowed in concentration. He never got good at keeping a bunch of things in the air at once, George remembers. Dream motions the cereal back into the box.

"You're not dead because we work ourselves overtime trying to save your ass—"

“So don’t,” Dream says and he stands from the couch. “I’m going home. You’ve been so—I can’t even stand to be around you since the warehouse incident.”

Tiny knives stab at George’s heart. Dream can’t stand him. He pushes his own weakness aside.

“Fine, go,” George tells him as emotionlessly as he can. “I’ll walk you out. Run from the truth, Dream.”

“No, *you* run the numbers tomorrow, and then tell me if it ends up as a negative or positive,” Dream tells him matter of factly. “Then, if I’m right, I call the shots for the next ambush.”

In a moment of weakness and anger, George speaks bitterly. “Fine.”

Dream leaves without saying goodbye, and George shuts the door angrily.

He can’t keep doing this—can’t keep undermining George’s authority, can’t keep not listening, can’t keep complaining about George wanting to keep him safe. He’ll admit he’s overprotective at times, but even Sapnap thinks Dream is too reckless. That’s got to count for something, right?

The sight of Dream’s retreating figure down his driveway waters something sad inside of his chest.

He’d apologize, but he’s not sorry.

◆◆

Dream doesn’t look at him when he comes into the office the next morning, just angrily avoids his eyes as he slams a french vanilla coffee on George’s desk.

“Thank you,” George tries. “I’m still angry with you.”

“I’m still angry with you too,” Dream says, looking right over his head. “But I— You have your meeting in fifteen minutes. I checked. So have fun. I’m going to draw up the plan for the next ambush.”

George bites back a smile as Dream stomps away, head still held high. He looks down at his coffee and Dream’s drawn a little angry face in white pen on the lid.

When he enters the meeting, he squares his shoulders as he sits down on his seat. “Hello.”

Two men sit in front of him—he recognises one of them as the district supervisor, Armstrong. The other man is one he has not met before.

“Hello George,” Armstrong says as he gestures towards the man next to him. “This is Donavan, organizational head.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” George says as he sticks out a hand over the desk for him to shake.

Donavan wordlessly takes it and firmly grasps his hand to shake.

“We’re here to discuss the incident at the warehouse last Thursday,” Armstrong says. “With— was

it Dream?"

"Yes," George breathes out.

"Very risky," Armstrong says, gaze turning judgemental.

George knew it. It was the worst idea he had ever heard in his life; they could've sent in a robot to spy. Their whole operation was practically bust.

"But, lucky for you, Dream was quick enough to catch two very important people," Armstrong finishes. "We completed a successful interrogation, the files have been emailed to you."

George's heart sinks into his stomach. "How's the— did we ruin our budget? With the medical bills?"

Donavan chuckles and looks at Armstrong.

"George," Armstrong starts. "If you broke the bank, we'd be having a very different kind of conversation right now. The guys he caught? We didn't expect to get for the next few months. We're wiring the excess to your android development."

The two men laugh so George laughs nervously too, unsure of what that means exactly.

"Technically, you did, but I understand," Armstrong says. "Dream is a very useful tool. Keep doing what you're doing with him."

"I will," George says numbly. "'I'll go—I'll tell him myself."

George leaves the room shortly after and goes back to his office. Sure enough, Dream is sitting on his chair, levitating an apple above his palm.

"So, George," Dream says as he spins around in the chair once with a grin. "What did you find?"

"You were— shut up. What do you want to do for the operation?"

Dream grins wider as he stands up, apple still spinning in the air above his palm. "I told you."

"Sorry for worrying about you," George bitterly states while crossing his arms.

"Don't be like that," Dream says, but he doesn't sound sorry in the slightest. "George, seriously. You're great at what you do."

"I know," George mutters.

"Just let me take the lead every once in a while," Dream continues. "I want— Sapnap isn't here today, but I have a plan I've already drawn up. So I'll tell you."

George exhales loudly. He can fix this. "Okay."

"Sergaent," Dream says, softer this time. "Seriously."

He hopes Dream doesn't get used to calling him that. George is getting that commander promotion if it kills him, and then he's putting Dream in a very slow, disgustingly boring mission as revenge.

Dream explains his plan to obtain the coordinates for the next location the group is expected to be. It's surprisingly well thought out. Dream's given himself quite a hefty role in this. George is thinking to agree with it, under the condition Dream takes backup, when it happens.

The apple in Dream's hand drops to the floor, and when Dream sticks out a hand to stop it, nothing happens.

George stares at it for a moment, and then looks to Dream. "What was that?"

"What was what?" Dream asks coolly as he bends down to pick it up.

"Your— your telekinesis stopped working," George says in disbelief. "You—"

"It only happens sometimes," Dream insists.

"You said it was fixed," George hisses. "You lied to me."

George knows what he's going to say next. Dream knows what George is going to say next. George knows that Dream knows what he's going to say next.

"I'm going on this mission," Dream states, folding his arms.

"No you're not," George says at the same time.

They've arrived at a stalemate. George thinks for a moment.

"Fine," he finally says. "We'll do it your way. Day after tomorrow."

Dream looks flabbergasted. "Wh— Really?"

"Don't give me a chance to change my mind," George tells him. "I— I trust your decision making capabilities, Dream. Just, be at mine the night before, okay?"

"When am I not?" Dream snorts, before engulfing George in a hug. "You have no idea how much this means to me, thank you. I just— I know I said some stuff yesterday but I— I know we aren't supposed to be so emotional in the office, but like— I'll do you *proud* George. You'll see."

George feels guilty at the swell of emotion in Dream's voice.

↔

He barges into Sapnap's room after work. "We're going to go plant a bug."

Sapnap stares at George like he's lost it. George explains what's happening with Dream; how he wants to go in with this fancy mission where he juggles four things at once, with the two of them manning the technical side.

"Well, he's done more complicated things before," Sapnap tries to justify. "It's really not the worst plan— we could do it his way."

George pursues his lips. "His telekinesis is fucked, Sapnap. It's all glitchy."

Sapnap's eyes widened in concern. "What?"

George explains in another breath, everything else that had happened. He conveniently leaves out their argument, and goes over the supposed boiler incident, tells Sapnap that it's too risky to send Dream the way he wants to be sent.

"We can plant this bug," George insists. "I can plant this bug. It'll give us the coordinates we need, I just have to—"

"George," Sapnap interrupts. "Don't you think it's a little risky? Actually, it's a lot risky. You're not trained the same way he is."

"I won't go without equipment," George promises. "I have a few prototyped sensors I can use, I can— Sapnap, you and I both know that if Dream walks into that room, and his telekinesis fails, he'll die."

Sapnap looks at him and swallows hard.

"I've been here long enough," George promises. "I know how to— we can't waste time. Dream is coming to my place tonight, and I—I had my home lockdown features upgraded. I can—I'll flip a switch and it'll keep him in there. Dream will be stuck at my house for eighteen hours, but if we do this right, we can— this is a twenty minute job."

Sapnap stares at him long and hard, before finally speaking. "Fine."

George almost jumps in shock. "What?"

"I think you know what you're talking about," Sapnap states. "And I think that your undying love for Dream, or whatever the fuck it's called will pull through."

George rolls his eyes. "Whatever, intern."

"George," Sapnap says seriously, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Seriously. You can't die."

"Obviously," George groans. "Who else is going to stop Dream from getting himself killed?"

It's supposed to be a joke but he can see the apprehension in Sapnap's eyes. Sapnap, as his friend, would absolutely disagree. As his subordinate, he will do as George says.

That's what George likes about him. He's able to compartmentalize his emotions, understand that George, despite having similar emotional sentiments about Dream as both his friend and an authority figure, makes the choice for the betterment of the team and not just because he loves him.

It feels bad to lie.

Not bad enough to not do it. Dream is on his couch, laughing as George tosses popcorn into his mouth. The ambiance reminds George of when he was studying for his finals in junior year, and Dream had broken into his house and scaled up the wall. He had a nasty looking scratch on his cheek.

"You'll never believe this," Dream had said excitedly. "There was a—a cat in a tree, and I got her down. That's so—I've always wanted to do that."

George had cleaned the wound with rubbing alcohol and a cotton pad, and Dream had to wear a

Hello Kitty bandaid on his face. He'd teased George about having them, would cover his ears when George tried to explain that college is expensive and New York is expensive and they were on clearance and I don't have to take this from you.

They'd stayed up late afterwards, George at his books, Dream trying to catch kernels in his mouth after he tossed them in the air.

Oh Dream, George wants to say sadly now. You're going to hate me after this.

“Toss it higher,” Dream commands and George obliges.

“Hey, I left something in my bedroom for you,” George finally musters up the guts to say.

“Your bedroom?” Dream gasps. “George!”

“Stop, you idiot,” George tells him, hitting his arm for good measure. “Go get it.”

Dream groans exaggeratedly as he gets to his feet, and clamors up the stairs. When he's out of sight, George breathes out another apology, and runs out the door.

“George? Where are you—”

He slams the door, cortisol levels through the roof as he shakily presses his thumb against the pad of the security pin. “Initiate lockdown protocol six.”

George hears Dream slam his fist down on the door.

“I'm sorry, Dream,” George says through the intercom. “I'm so fucking sorry.”

“George!” Dream roars. “What the fuck is— let me out!”

“I can't,” George whispers, before he steps out onto the driveway, Sapnap waiting for him in his car.

He can't bear to listen to him any further, and he's shaking as he opens the door. “Let's go.”

Sapnap looks at him pointedly like he wants to say something, but decides against it. The drive to the headquarters is silent. George imagines how Dream looks when he's angry, imagines how he's probably going to rip up the curtains and claw at the doors and scream until his throat is raw.

He blocks out the image the best he can. It doesn't work all too well.

Chapter End Notes

yoooo wtf are they doing.

Anyways. Hi

hope you're all doing well on this fine day/night - i made a playlist for this but im not happy with it yet so stay tuned if you like those.

Thank you all so much for your very nice comments on the last chapter :) would love to know your thoughts as always, see you in the next one!!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The bug gets planted.

The elaborate plan Dream had come up with, turns out, was unnecessary. George practically walks out with nothing more than a scratch. When he gets back to the headquarters and finishes punching in the information, adrenaline pumping in his ears, he lets himself check the security camera footage of his house.

Static.

Panic erupts in George's chest. He should have known this was a bad idea. Locking Dream in there was bound to lead to disaster. He tells Sapnap to drive, drive as fast as he can. He sprints down the driveway, scrambling up the staircase and entering the pin code to disengage the security system.

He's fucked everything up. He's kept Dream safe.

Until they can figure out what's making his telekinesis act oddly, until everything is fixed, he can't send Dream back out there with a good conscience. Dream is probably furious right now. He half expects to come home to the house in shambles; the drywall punched through, plates broken on the floor, ripped photographs strewn across a chipped coffee table.

He'd deserve it too.

He opens the door to Dream sitting on his couch, calmly eating cereal straight from the box. He looks calm, chest moving up and down rhythmically. Aside from George's footsteps and the rustling of the box as Dream shoves his hand into it, it's silent. George shuts the door and cautiously takes a step towards him.

“Dream?” George whispers. “Are you— are you alright?”

Dream finally turns his head to look at him. His eyes are a bloodshot red and his bottom lip quivers for a moment before his lips press into a thin line. Guilt rolls around in George's chest like a marble on slanted ground, but he can't bring himself to say anything. He feels bad and doesn't feel bad in the slightest at the same time.

Dream looks absolutely nauseous with anxiety. George hopes he hasn't worked himself up too badly.

A sick part of him is hopeful that the worry turns Dream into a more empathetic person. The rest of him just wants to forget any of this even happened.

On one hand, George has successfully completed a mission all on his own. Without some sort of supernatural blood in his veins, without someone in his ear telling him what to do. He would like to think that if this wasn't under such horrible circumstances, Dream would celebrate his achievement with him. Instead, they're looking at each other blankly in the living room.

The adrenaline dilutes itself in his bloodstream.

George waits for Dream to lose his temper. Instead, Dream places the cereal box aside and stands

up, walking towards him with heavy steps. He comes to a stop right in front of George; towering over him in some sort of attempt to regain control over the situation.

George wonders what he's thinking.

He thinks that if he'd been given some sort of alien ability to do things people weren't supposed to be able to do, manipulate the nature of science and mathematics and the concepts that academia was built on, he'd probably develop a bit of a habit for being reckless as well. He can't blame Dream for that. But Dream had sworn that the world's safety was more important than his own, and that younger version of Dream that had made that commitment clearly wasn't aware of all the sacrifices that would come with that promise.

Dream wanted to embody heroism. When he'd confined himself to this organization, he'd been damned to servitude.

George swallows hard, but stands his ground. Dream has quite a bit of height on him, but he refuses to back down. Dream looks down at him coolly, eyes unimpressed. George stares back, trying to keep himself unreadable.

Dream raises a hand in the air, and for a moment George thinks he's going to strike him. He closes his eyes as tightly as he can before he feels a gentle hand cupping his cheek.

When he opens his eyes, Dream gives him a look that is nothing short of betrayed.

I know, George thinks sadly. *I wish I was sorrier.*

He's never done anything like this before. Dream always takes the role of the reckless one between the two of them. What George did, should anyone find out about it, would land him in a lot of trouble. He'd twisted some of the details of the mission in order to get it approved. George was authorized to be on site only on the conditions that Dream would be too.

He could get fired.

Dream is looking at him, fire in his eyes. George wants him to do something. It feels as though time slows down when he finally opens his mouth to speak.

"Are you hurt?" Dream finally asks.

George shakes his head no wordlessly.

Dream sighs. "Give me your hands."

George frowns at the request, but Dream is looking at him with something so aggressively emotional that he doesn't feel like giving him any trouble. He places his hands, hesitantly, in Dream's clammy palms.

Dream is shaking as he observes George's hand under the yellow light of the living room, before letting out a short hiss.

"George," Dream starts, voice low and irrationally angry given the very low gravity of the situation. "You've cut your finger."

George looks down, and sure enough, there's a tiny cut along the line of his index finger. He can't take it anymore; the silence that rings around in his ears, the nausea that climbs up the walls of his stomach in anticipation of what will happen next.

Is this how Dream feels when he doesn't listen to George? George feels like his eardrums are going to burst. How does Dream stomach this kind of guilt so often?

He doesn't.

Dream does what he wants because he feels it's right. George thinks what he did was right too. It still feels like the worst thing in the world. George chooses his next words as though he was Dream; a defiance of nature, suave and self assured, invincible because he says so.

"That's it?" George asks with a grin. "I think I'm a lot better at this than you are."

It is not received well.

Dream looks the opposite of entertained as he storms off towards George's cupboard, grabbing a package of bandages and starting the tap. He holds out a hand in George's direction and George feels himself go barreling forward. He ends up slamming into Dream's chest.

Dream looks down at him again, *so* disappointed. "Give me your hand."

"Dream, it's fine—"

"No it's not, George," Dream says between gritted teeth. "You are so fucking stupid sometimes."

George places his hand in Dream's and watches the water roll over it.

"Do you know when you got hurt?" Dream asks, wiping George's hand dry on his shirt.

George shakes his head no.

Dream looks at him with the same disappointed look as he rips off a thin part of the bandage and begins to wrap it. Once it's tied off, Dream looks at him with so much resentment that George can feel it in his bones.

"Dream—"

"George," Dream starts. "I need you to— are you crazy? You could've died!"

George scoffs. "Okay, but I didn't."

They look at each other challengingly.

"You've studied my DNA sequence, right George?" Dream finally asks, the words scalding hot.

George nods, unsure of where this is going. Dream holds out a hand again, telekinesis sending George shooting backwards onto the couch. He grunts as his back hits the pillows and sits up straighter.

"Good. And how are you able to do that, exactly?" Dream asks, tone condescending as he walks over and kneels in front of him, hands on either side of his legs.

George swallows hard, the proximity making it considerably harder to think.

"You take blood samples, right?" Dream coaxes, and George nods his head wordlessly again.

"So tell me," Dream starts, anger seeping back into his tone. "If you cut yourself on something in there, and left behind blood, do you think it's possible you've compromised your identity?"

George opens his mouth to protest. “But I wore gloves! It probably didn’t—”

“It doesn’t matter,” Dream tells him through gritted teeth. “Tell me, how easy was it to get in?”

George is silent. *Too easy.*

“Do you think that I’m stupid?” Dream asks, expression tight as he leans closer. “I bet you walked out wondering why I bothered with all of those theatrics and chalked it up to me being dumber than you.”

George leans further back as beads of sweat begin to form on his hairline. “That’s not what—that’s not what I was thinking.”

“Then what *were* you thinking?” Dream asks furiously as he grabs onto George’s shoulders. “Because it sounds like you weren’t!”

George searches for the right thing to say as dread begins to make a home in his system. What *had* he been thinking? He wanted to keep Dream safe. He’d been so one track minded about it.

“I’m telling the boss,” Dream starts, and George grabs his hand in panic.

“Dream, you can’t,” George begs. “He’ll fire me.”

Dream looks unimpressed with his justification. “Maybe that’ll be a good thing.”

George’s heart drops to his stomach. Dream doesn’t mean that. He’s speaking out of anger. The two of them will be back to normal in a few weeks, laughing over french toast on company time when this whole operation is done and dealt with. He tears his brain away from the paranoia that he’s damaged their relationship beyond repair, made too much of a mess to ever replenish the trust between the two of them. Dream stares at him blankly again, a thousand miles away from where he’s standing. George stares back for anything, *anything*.

“You don’t trust me,” Dream finally concludes. “How are we supposed to work together if you don’t trust me?”

“Dream,” George says in disbelief, reaching out for his shoulder. “I do trust you, I swear. You’re one of my best friends, I—”

“I don’t care that we’re best friends, or whatever the hell that means,” Dream spits with venom. “You don’t trust me, or you wouldn’t have lied to go on that mission that you weren’t equipped to take on. You would have consulted me instead of locking me up in your house—” he gestures towards the windows, “—and running into the night. What if you were in trouble, George? What if something bad had happened?”

“It didn’t,” George repeats, and Dream clenches his fists in frustration.

“What if you fucking died?” Dream yells as he collapses onto the couch, head in his hands.

George feels like they’ve had this conversation before. His eyes sting but he bites the inside of his mouth, bites back the tears, and forces himself to have this conversation like an adult.

“Dream, it’s—this is how I feel when you run off and do things without telling me too, y’know,” George says softly, afraid to set him off.

Dream looks at him, really looks at him with so much pissed-off-astonishment that George wants

to take back what he just said immediately.

“Yeah, I’m sure sending in someone who has no training is exactly the same as—”

“Fuck this,” George spits, cutting him off. “I’m tired. I want to go to bed.”

He doesn’t have the energy to be yelled at and talked down to. Maybe he doesn’t have some stupid fucking chemical inside of his body that lets him play God on weekdays, but he has half a mind and the decency to at least attempt to explain his thought process. Something Dream never fucking does.

Dream hides behind the idea of the greater good while taking risks for kicks. *Yeah, Dream, go ahead. Fucking kill me. Stretch my veins until they’re wire thin from stress, look me in the eye and tell me it’s for the greater good. I’ll eat it up like the idiot you take me to be.*

“Well, don’t let me stop you,” Dream says back, getting up. “I’m going home.”

“Good,” George tries to say with distaste, but it comes out sad.

A beat in silence. Dream moves towards the door. George’s mouth speaks on its own accord at the same time.

“Don’t go.”

Dream looks back at him, eyes betraying the anguish he feels. George tries to think hard enough so that he can see what he’s thinking.

“I can’t read minds, George,” Dream says shortly. “Tell me what you need to tell me. I’m leaving, after.”

Stay. Stay stay stay.

“Stay,” George repeats. “You can’t— please stay.”

If Dream goes, then they’re angry with each other and it’s real. If Dream leaves, the same argument they’ve been having for longer than any fight they’ve had before keeps its streak. If Dream leaves, he might not come back.

Everything selfish and everything prideful comes to a head. It waits for George to do something, calculate some sort of compromise that keeps everyone safe. He can’t do it. He looks at Dream with wild eyes, and Dream looks back with an indifference that cuts through him.

Dream turns on his heel. George’s throat feels like it’s going to burst.

Stay. Dream, don’t go. I’m not sorry, but don’t go.

The door slams shut. The umbrella propped up by the coat hanger hits the ground. George stares blankly at the cereal box on the couch.

They’ve never fought like this before. Dream has never looked at George like that before.

George closes his eyes and tells himself he can’t cry, won’t cry over this. If he cries then that means that it happened. If he pretends that all of this is a little misunderstanding, then maybe tomorrow they can go back to normal.

He runs a hand through his hair as he exhales shakily. *What is normal nowadays?*

They fought a lot recently. More than they have ever before.

Not even when George was getting his masters and Dream would want to fuck around and do nothing. Not even when George was more annoyed by Dream than endeared by him.

It's when George started to notice the little things about Dream; the way he only picks at his cuticles on every other finger, graphed out the curve of his lip, measured out how his hand felt against his.

It stresses him out.

He can manage Dream fine. He had managed Dream fine. The past year and a half, here in Colorado, has been close to perfect. They'd even talked about buying a house together once their leases run out, since they spend so much time together anyways, and they could always sell it if one of them had to move out.

They'd always worked fine until George fucked it up and let emotions cloud his judgement. Until Dream had to get more reckless to get his fix of adrenaline.

It's George's fault.

And he still doesn't feel guilty.

Dream doesn't feel the same way. He knows this. Dream winks at the news station hosts that come down for anonymous interviews, asks George what he'll do once Dream gets married off and settles into a new life as a housewife. He's teasing, and George is upset for the rest of the day at the idea of Dream doing anyone else's dishes but theirs.

He digs his palms into his eyes, wishes Dream was here. He wants to go after him. He opens the door in a moment of weakness, ready to run out, when he almost trips over something propped against his door.

The thing moves and pins him to the ground, knee on his back. George coughs, and the pressure removes itself. He's manhandled roughly so that his back is to the ground. Dream is sitting on top of him. Despite his better judgement, he goes red.

"You fucking scared me," Dream hisses as he moves off George. "Go back inside."

"Why are you— you're still here," George tells him like he isn't aware.

Dream didn't leave. He can fix this.

"Yeah, dumbass. If your identity is compromised, I can't exactly leave you here knowing you can't fend for yourself."

George stares at him incredulously, like he can't believe he's here, before he laughs. Dream still doesn't smile.

"I'm really sorry I worried you," George starts with something he knows is somewhat true, before Dream waves him off.

"I'm fucking pissed at you, George, go back inside," Dream repeats. "I don't wanna talk to you."

George feels his shoulders slump involuntarily. "C'mon, Dream, don't—"

"Fuck off!" Dream angrily whispers, flicking his fingers, once, twice, three times before he finally

successfully gets George a few inches off the ground and back into the house.

George goes to run at the door but Dream slams it shut. He takes the hint, but still walks to the door in a last attempt to talk to him.

“What if someone tries to take you?” George yells, slamming his fist on the area above the doorknob. “What then?”

“I can handle myself,” Dream yells back.

No you can't. If George has seen anything this week, it's that Dream can't. Not until they fix what's wrong with his telekinesis.

He slumps down against the doorway defiantly and pulls out his phone. If Dream is going to torture him by not wanting to talk it out while George is trapped inside, fine. He's not getting any rest either.

He wonders whether Dream was bluffing when he said he was going to go to the supervisor about George disobeying protocol. He wants to believe that Dream would keep this miscommunication between them, but he supposes the two of them have been acting more like disgraced coworkers than friends as of lately.

I'll make it up to you, George wants to tell him. *I trust you. I'd jump off a fucking skyscraper if you told me it was safe. I trust you with me more than anyone else.*

He can hear Dream asking the next question. *Then why don't you act like it?*

George doesn't have an answer for him.

Chapter End Notes

hiiiiii

hope everyone is doing good! i want to promise gaps between updates won't be that long but I can't bc I am going to be busier now but I'll do my best to maintain a decent schedule that doesn't make people want to tear their hair out.

Hope this chapter was enjoyable, thank you for reading! Would love to see your thoughts in the comments if you feel compelled to do so - see you all soon hopefully :)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream is gone by the time George wakes up. He checks his phone to see that Dream has left him a message ordering him to wear his company issued jacket to work. There's a tracking chip embedded in the buttons, and they're next to impossible to destroy. He rolls his eyes, but still wears it in order to avoid the conflict it'll create if he doesn't. He contemplates dropping it off at the thrift store and calling in sick, just to see if Dream will freak out again, but decides against it.

He feels guilty. Dream is just looking out for him. Then he remembers the number of times Dream wanders off to do things his way, the number of times he returns with the skin on his torso peeled back and an expectant look on his face for George to just fix it, and he feels justified in his anger.

When did they get like this?

George walks into work the next day to see a sheet of blue paper on his desk. The words 'Civilian Protection Program' are printed across the top in bulky black letters. He glances around, trying to catch someone's eye for an explanation, but nobody pays him any mind. He takes it in his hand and walks out of the lab area and into the administrative office. The secretary looks at him, and gestures to Armstrong's office.

He walks in and tries his best to sound polite. "Sir?"

Armstrong is typing furiously on his computer and holds up a finger as he squints at the screen of his computer. He appears satisfied after a moment, and finally spares George a look.

"Is there any new paperwork I'm meant to fill out in regards to this?" George asks, holding up the sheet of paper and shaking it twice for emphasis. "I don't believe there were any civilian identity compromises for the last mission, but if there was an issue with the —"

"Have a seat, George," Armstrong interrupts him, gesturing towards the chair. "We have some things to discuss."

George feels a wave of nausea wash over him for a brief moment, black spots clouding his vision before he furiously blinks them away. For a moment, he thinks he's been caught. He shouldn't have been out there without Dream, he knows that. If any of the higher ups learned what he did, there's a good chance his career would be tossed out the window. He wills one foot in front of the other until he's in the seat as he flips through all the possible reasons this could be happening in his head.

Armstrong sighs, moving the screen of the monitor aside so that he can look at George. George tries his best to appear innocent, like he hadn't *technically* lied on government issued documents and committed what *could* be classified as an act of domestic terrorism. He had also technically, on paper, held Dream hostage, which doesn't particularly act to alleviate the severity of his other actions.

The guilt bites at his insides again.

"We've received an anonymous tip that your identity could have been compromised," Armstrong starts, handing George another piece of paper.

George frowns, waiting for Armstrong to continue. “We get those all the time, there’s no weight to them.”

His heart beats around erratically in his chest. While it’s true that they often receive anonymous tips claiming that they’ve obtained personal information from employees in their facility, it’s a bluff more times than it’s not. A scare tactic in an attempt to force mass resignation and deplete manpower. They’d learned that pretty early on.

This time though, it is possible that the compromise is real. George prays that this is just an untimely coincidence so he doesn’t have to listen to Dream tell him *I told you so* when he inevitably finds out.

“In normal circumstances, I would agree,” Armstrong starts. “But they’ve sent proof. Documents detailing discrepancies in your DNA. Information that can’t be extracted by people who don’t know what they’re doing.”

A feeling of peril blossoms softly in George’s stomach as his hands begin to shake. This couldn’t be happening. “How would they have even obtained my DNA?”

He hopes he’s made the right call by playing it dumb as Armstrong looks at him again. He thinks back to Dream threatening to let their higher ups know about his joyride. Was he serious? Is Dream about to get him fired over some disagreement between them instead of choosing to have them work it out?

Dream doesn’t want you, the voice in his head offers unhelpfully. *He doesn’t need you. He does fine on his own, and he could do what he actually wanted to do if you disappeared.*

The realization is painful, but he swallows it down in favour of saving his own ass right now. He can deal with the delicate nature of the most important relationship of his life later.

Armstrong shrugs as he uses the back of his hands to wipe the sweat from his brow. “I think it could be an internal matter, if you catch my drift, but I don’t want you to worry about that part right now.”

Internal matter. Armstrong thinks someone has double crossed them. Someone could have double crossed them, for all he knows. He doesn’t even know where he cut his finger. Armstrong doesn’t even suspect that George could have made a mistake.

George nods, trying to appear indifferent as relief courses through him. *Dream hadn’t told. He can fix this. They can come back from this.*

“However, due to the nature of your current mission with your intermediate squadron,” Armstrong starts. “We can’t take any chances. You’ll be forced to isolate yourself from our headquarters in a remote area, with civilian level protection measures, while we figure out who the rat is.”

George’s jaw goes slack as his mouth drops open. “What?”

Civilian level protection *had* to be a joke. There’s no way they’d do that to him. He’s a *Sergeant*. He’s in the running to become a fucking commander, and he’s not even thirty yet. He’s a trailblazer, and they want to send him to a safehouse to guard him from *danger*? Go to hell. Like anyone’s had an issue with danger a day in their lives here. This fucking nine to five practically requires him to smoke danger out of a crackpipe.

“Armstrong,” George laughs, but he’s met with a serious expression. “You can’t be serious.”

Armstrong folds his arms and leans back as he tilts his head sideways. “Why’s that?”

George stares at him in disbelief. He *can’t* be serious. “I’m a Sergeant. I don’t need civilian level protection.”

“You’re an off-site Sergeant. You are not physically equipped to take on the risks that our front line employees do,” Armstrong responds, sounding irritated. “I don’t have the time to argue with you about this, George. The file just needs to go through Human Resources. They’ll give you your new alias, address—”

“—Address? I have to relocate?” George asks loudly.

Civilian level protection means he’s going to be sent off somewhere far away, guarded heavily, until they’re sure the threat has been eliminated. George has only managed two cases of those. They were *actual* civilians. The first case was resolved in three days and the guy was free to resume living normally by the end of the week. The second case had taken thirty seven days of isolation before they could even consider letting the individual back into the country.

It means George will be taken off his cases, and given paperwork to fill out for however long it takes to get all of this sorted and out of the way.

Armstrong shushes him angrily, and motions for him to lean closer. “Don’t announce this to the entire building, George, especially when we might have a rat. Use your brain.”

George sees red for a moment and he wants to argue, wants to bite back about how Armstrong’s management is mediocre at best, but he stops when he sees the glint in his eyes.

“I don’t want to have to dig into all of your previous missions for where a possible leak of information could have taken place,” Armstrong says, venom in his tone.

George watches the light beat down on the top of Armstrong’s bald head. He wonders how funny it would be if he took out a handkerchief right now and pretended to polish it clean. Armstrong wouldn’t find it funny. The image calms him down and stops him from having an aneurysm.

“George? Are you listening?” Armstrong repeats, no space for ambiguity left in the way he speaks. “I said, I don’t want to have to go tracing for a source as to where the breach could have taken place. You’re a good employee. If I saw something I wasn’t supposed to—”

George tries his best to appear cool and level headed as panic continues to dance in his chest. *He knows.* Armstrong knows that George was the one who planted the bug last night. His fingers clench into a fist under the desk. He moves his thumb over the bandage.

“—I’m on your side, George,” Armstrong finishes, looking him over once again. “I want you here again at the end of the day, and we’re going to discuss the terms of the program. Alright?”

George isn’t winning this. He bites his tongue and swallows down the anger as far as he can manage before he speaks again. “Okay.”

Armstrong finally nods, satisfied. “Good. Dream is in the briefing room, recalibrating some equipment. I suspect you’ll want to see him and go over the information the bug he’s planted has managed to obtain.”

George nods, but makes no effort to stand for a moment. Finally, he gets up, nods again, before he backs out of the office. Dream was right. His identity had been compromised. Now all he can do is sit there and wait for the information to somehow get destroyed. He’s a sitting duck now. If he tries anything, he’ll get fired. If he gets fired, there’s nobody to look after Dream. Dream probably still

hates him right now.

When he gets to the conference room, he sees Sapnap and Dream sitting on opposite sides of the table. Dream is waving his hands maniacally as he talks so loudly that George can hear him through the glass door.

George forces the door open.

“I don’t know if I can work with him anymore,” Dream is saying, but he stops when he sees George.

George’s heart sinks to his feet as his eyes meet Dream’s. He looks awful; eyes sunken in and framed by dark bags.

“George,” Dream stammers. “I didn’t—”

“We’ve got a lot to do today,” George cuts him off. “Let’s—I think we should start.”

Sapnap looks between the two of them awkwardly. Dream hadn’t said a name, but it didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out who he was referring to. The two of them argue too much. It’s getting in the way of their friendship. As much as George enjoys being able to see Dream every day and get his opinion on the work he does, preserving, or at this point, salvaging what’s left of the two of them is more important.

George goes through the analytics as Sapnap punches numbers into the computer and Dream fiddles around with the wires inside of the cryogenic microwave George was working on the last time he was in here. The room is uncharacteristically cold. None of them talk about what happened.

“Nope,” Sapnap announces suddenly, before slamming his laptop shut. “I’m not doing this anymore.”

“We still have ten more sets to go,” George informs him, but Sapnap is already walking over to the wall to unplug his charger.

“You two need to work your shit out,” Sapnap answers matter of factly. “I’m not—you guys are best friends, and whatever the fuck you’re doing right now is so weird.”

“We’re not doing anything,” Dream injects, but Sapnap seems to have made up his mind.

“Sort yourselves out,” he repeats. “Then meet me in George’s office so we can finalize this report and send it off.”

The door swings shut behind him as he saunters off dramatically. George rolls his eyes before he looks back to Dream, who has become very interested in a spare screw laying on the table. George watches him hover a finger over it before twisting his wrist. The screw flies into the air and spins for a moment before landing back on the mahogany. He repeats the motion, keeping the screw in the air for longer this time.

“Is it working better now?” George asks hesitantly.

Dream closes his eyes for a moment, before finally directing his gaze at George. His eyes are offended and just as hurt as they were yesterday, betraying the nonchalance of his posture.

“The telekinesis?” Dream asks softly, clearing his throat after he speaks.

George nods.

“Yeah,” Dream tells him, before exhaling and placing the screw delicately back in its original position.

George doesn’t know what to say. Sorry I hurt you. Sorry you hurt me. Sorry you don’t care. Sorry I don’t care either. We hurt each other and we don’t care. What does that say about us? What does that mean? How are we?

“I forget sometimes,” Dream finally confesses.

George looks at him confusedly. “Forget what?”

Dream smiles and shakes his head before letting out a bitter laugh. “That you’re human.”

The words feel like a punch in the gut, even though they don’t feel malicious.

“What does that mean?” George finally dares to ask.

Dream looks deep in thought for a moment. George wonders what could possibly be going through his head. It’s a little funny that Dream doesn’t perceive George as human. If anyone is less human, technically speaking, it has to be Dream. He’s a freak of nature in the loveliest packaging, like somebody gave the most fleeting form of happiness a body to occupy. George remembers why he loves him right now. Boy who sat on the outdoor windowsill of the campus library so that he could walk George home that many years ago. Boy who sits outside of his house to protect him even when George has hurt him the most. Boy who gambles with his life like he has a dozen more stored away in the pantry, like he could drop dead and come back to life without breaking a sweat. Reckless and so fiercely loyal that it makes George’s teeth hurt.

“You’re so—” Dream pauses for a moment, considering his words. “You’re just so— you’re just George. Kind of a genius. You’ve always been— when I first met you, you were George. I thought you were so cool. All I wanted was to be your friend. And now you’re my friend, and you’re *still* George, but now it feels like you’re everybody’s genius instead of just mine.”

George feels himself turn red involuntarily. “Oh.”

It’s a lame response, he’s aware. His brain function reduces significantly more when Dream takes his hand from across the table, but looks to the floor.

“Don’t be mad, George,” Dream pleads as his voice cracks. “I’m going to tell you something and you can’t be mad.”

They’re okay. They’re going to be okay. Dream wants to fix this. He hasn’t given up on them yet.

“I promise,” George says with a solemnness reserved for moments like these. “I won’t be mad.”

“I sent the tip to put you in civilian protection,” Dream whispers. “I did it.”

George exhales. The words come as both a relief and a disappointment. At least he knows that some malicious organization doesn’t have any solid leads on uncovering his identity yet. On the other hand, he’s probably going to be all but removed from this mission for his own safety and put to do remote work until it’s finished.

To his own surprise, he laughs. “Why?”

Dream, relieved that George hasn't reacted negatively to this announcement, speaks a little louder this time. "I didn't—I want you safe."

They look at each other again. There's regret in Dream's eyes. He knows. He finally understands a portion of the anguish George faces every day. George feels his pain too. He aches for Dream, who has been betrayed and humbled all at once. He aches for him, but he's still not sorry.

"I know," George admits. "I'm—I can't apologize. I'm not sorry."

Dream nods understandingly, looking away from him again. "It's alright."

George tries to recalibrate their positions in relation to each other in his brain. They weave between axis and finally land parallel to each other on opposite sides.

"I'm not allowed to talk to you in the safe house," Dream whispers. "They said that they can't risk it. They're considering giving Sapnap the lead on this, even though he's still an intern."

Better it be Sapnap than some other miserable idiot, in George's opinion.

"Promise me you'll listen to him," George pleads. "Actually promise me."

"I will," Dream says sincerely. "I know. I was angry last night, but I think I understand it now."

George looks at him again and the yearning inside of him tightens in his chest so painfully. He wants him. He wants Dream to himself, wants him tucked into safe corners, never to be touched by anything bad.

"I think you forget you're human too," George tells him quietly. "I think you think you're some sort of—I don't know what you think you are. But you still—I still have to patch you up when you get—I know—I knew what I was signing up for, but it doesn't become easier."

Dream's chest rises and falls as he looks at George again, squeezes his hand tighter. "I know."

"I don't think you do," George insists. "You think you're invincible because you can do some things not many other people can, but you're not."

Dream stays silent. George doesn't blame him. He supposes confronting your own mortality is even more painful when it seems like something you can fight off forever. Dream messes with the hands on his clock because he knows he can move the hands back into place, and George is the asshole who has to remind him that the gears are delicate while he has his fun.

"I don't think less of you for it," George adds because it feels like the right thing to say. "You could live a completely boring life if you wanted, and I didn't think you'd be selfish. I'd rather you were alive than anything else."

Alive. Heart beating in his chest, wrapped in George's arms, safe, safe, safe. Each other's and untouchable.

It'll never happen.

Dream loves danger, and George loves control. They aren't supposed to fit together. George would give up everything for him, and it's terrifying. Loving Dream is existing in a state of freefall, unable to see where the sky ends and the ground begins. George feels like his eyes are glued shut and his heart might fall out of his throat at any given moment.

He doesn't think that Dream would even for a second give up the adrenaline of being caught in the center of it all for anything. George doesn't blame him for it. It's all he knows.

They're not meant to fit together. He pushes the thought aside.

"I know," Dream admits quietly. "I know that. But I think that it would be worth it if—"

"Don't," George cuts him off firmly with a squeeze of his hand. "Don't you fucking dare."

Dream smiles lopsidedly, rolls his eyes. "Alright, don't worry. I'll be around, George. I have you to resurrect me from the grave."

How many times? George wants to scream. How close do you want to get to death? How many times will I have to pull you out?

"Don't bet on it," George warns, trying his best to sound lighthearted. "Or I'll pull out and go back to school."

He pushes thoughts of Dream resigning from his squadron far far away. He thinks of happy things, good things. He thinks of all the fun they'll have once all of this is over.

"When I get out of that safehouse," George starts. "I'm putting you on a municipal case."

Dream's eyes widen. "You wouldn't. You know I hate those."

"I know," George offers with a grin, and he hopes that Dream takes the bait.

"Motherfucker," Dream sighs, before he moves his hands too fast for George to see. The table between them flies out of the way and George finds himself launching face first into Dream's chest. Dream's arms wrap around him and George relaxes into his hold, letting himself indulge in a fantasy where the two of them do this more often.

"We'll be okay?" George asks out loud.

Dream presses his chin into the top of George's head. "Yeah. We will. I'll work fast, I promise. We'll get you out of that safehouse. I'll work fast."

"A week," George insists. "I don't want to be stuck in there for more than a week."

"You won't," Dream repeats. "I'll fix this."

It feels like it means more than just the mission.

"I'll fix this too," George replies.

It feels something like progress, which is good enough. As long as he's here, with Dream, he can close his eyes and pretend like everything is fine.

Chapter End Notes

heyyyyyyy lol

how is everyone? obligatory sorry this takes me a while to update message I decided I wanted to rewrite the first half so that's what caused the delay. sigh. what can you do? the lovely meaniezucchini on twitter made art of the last scene of the previous chapter and i am swooning - please go check it out (+drop a like b/c. holy shit) when you get the time. i literally stare at it every day. [art link click me click here](#)
thank you all for reading!! would love to know your thoughts in the comments if you feel particularly inclined to leave one. see you all very soonnn (hopefully) :)

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George is allowed to go home and pick out a few things to take with him. The safehouse location is somewhere in Northern Montana, near a ranch. The organization doesn't want there to be even the slightest chance of him being traced, so he's been temporarily demoted from Sergeant to IT support for a software company they have a partnership with. He debates bringing up that he would rather rip out his own teeth than go back to working IT, but he knows he's already pushing it. Armstrong had contemplated sending him to fucking *Japan*, but George had argued that it would be next to impossible for him to get help if he needed it in the case that he was sent overseas.

Dream and Sapnap escort him home. Nobody speaks during the short drive. Dream's leg bounces up and down the entire way, shaking the car. When they arrive at his house, Dream unbuckles his seatbelt and asks to come inside with him. It's a rhetorical question at this point. What's George's is Dream's.

Before George can open the door and follow him, Sapnap holds out a hand.

"George, I gotta tell you something," Sapnap says as soon as Dream is out of earshot.

George looks at him with concern. "What's up? Does Dream need to be here too?"

"No," Sapnap says hurriedly. "I just wanted to let you know that my glowstick tech prototype got approved."

George grins at him. "That's fantastic, congratulations!"

"They asked me to give you one before you left," Sapnap tells him, slipping him what appears to be a silver button. "Armstrong signed off on it, but told me to tell you not to tell anyone, including the bodyguards, or any organizational heads about it. You know how it works, right?"

George delicately takes the device from Sapnap and presses it over one of the pre-existing buttons on his shirt. He lightly presses down and the device snaps before it goes clear in colour. "Push over the top to activate the sensors."

"No," Sapnap tells him. "You have to completely snap it. It'll fall off and disintegrate once you do, the techware is too small to set off most intelligent material detectors. Press your nail—" Sapnap pushes the tip of his nail into the middle of the button lightly—"on it like this. I only have this one prototype right now, so I need you to be very careful. Only set it off if you're in danger."

"Alright," George sighs. "I need to—I wish I didn't have to take all these stupid security procedures."

"Your identity could have been compromised," Sapnap says sternly.

"No," George tells him, before glancing around and leaning in to whisper. "Dream told me that he reported it. There's no real danger. I'm gonna be locked out there until the mission is done with."

Sapnap doesn't look surprised by this information. "Dream aside, it's possible that your identity actually was compromised. It's not an accident."

George looks at him confusedly. “What are you saying?”

Sapnap swallows hard, before motioning George even closer to whisper, like anyone could hear them even though they’re both still sitting in the car.

“Don’t you think it’s weird? That despite the fact you wore gloves, your hand got cut?” Sapnap starts. “Gloves that were meant for Dream to be wearing. Gloves that have to go through and be approved by every engineer in the building.”

“Armstrong thinks we’re getting double crossed,” George admits. “I didn’t tell you this though, alright? Regardless of whether or not someone actually does have my DNA, I don’t—”

“George!” Dream yells from the porch. “C’mon!”

George rolls down the window. “Just a second! Giving Sapnap the code for my lab stuff.”

Dream crosses his arms but doesn’t move forward to investigate as George rolls the window back up and turns to Sapnap.

“—I don’t know why anyone on the inside would waste their time trying to extract Dream’s,” George finishes. “His DNA can only be extracted and accessed through the lab. The DNA in his blood self-destructs as soon as it exits his body’s closed system. *I know* that it’s full proof. I fucking coded the implant with his dad. Everyone on the inside knows this.”

“No, everyone in our sector knows this,” Sapnap points out. “Someone not in our sector wouldn’t.”

They never have to worry about Dream’s DNA being stolen for this reason; because the element they use to isolate it when it needs to be studied isn’t available to the public or private sector at all. George personally goes to collect it from Dream’s father, who manufactures it alone.

“What are you saying?” George finally asks.

“I’m saying I think Armstrong is right,” Sapnap tentatively pronounces. “But I think that— just keep the glow stick prototype on you at all times.”

“Why’d you name it glow stick?” George asks bemusedly, glancing down at it. “Does it glow?”

“No. You have to break through the membrane inside to activate the help response, idiot,” Sapnap scoffs. “It’s like a glow stick. In the sense it has to break before it works.”

“That’s actually clever,” George finally admits. “That’s— okay, good job.”

“Go kiss your boyfriend goodbye,” Sapnap laughs as he points his chin at the doorstep, where Dream has sat down on the welcome mat and crossed his arms begrudgingly. “He’s getting irritated.”

George hesitates. “Do you think he hates me?”

“No,” Sapnap responds without missing a beat.

“Why’d he say he didn’t want to work with me anymore earlier?” George asks, glancing back at the house. Dream is now lying down on his porch.

“He’s— You both need to talk to each other,” Sapnap states. “You’ve always been good together. This case is just a little different. You need to trust each other a lot more.”

“I trust Dream with my life,” George defends.

“I know. You need to trust him with his own life,” Sapnap points out. “And he needs to trust you with yours.”

George doesn’t have an answer to that. Sapnap stretches himself over to give George a hug, promises that they’ll do everything to wrap up this case and have it over with so they can bring him back.

“You fucking better,” George says as he finally climbs out of the car. “I hate working IT.”

“We’ll go fast George, don’t worry,” Sapnap calls. “I’m the new lead, which means we’re going to be considerably more productive.”

George rolls his eyes before waving. “Bye, intern. Bring me back.”

Sapnap salutes mockingly before he drives off and George finally climbs up the stairs to meet Dream. They enter in silence. George shuts the door and locks it, sees the umbrella lying on the floor of the lobby, and nearly loses it. Dream notices his expression fall immediately.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” he asks, placing a hand on George’s shoulder.

“I’m— I didn’t mean to—”

It’s too much all at once. What happens next is out of his control. He acted too recklessly, and now he’s going to be completely out of the loop. What if anything happens to Dream? Will they even bother to let him know? Is he going to come home, mission finally completed, expecting to see him on the couch and getting him back in a fucking urn instead?

“You’re shaking,” Dream points out, putting the other hand on George’s other shoulder. “George? You alright?”

George tries to shake his head yes but he can’t move. Dream takes the cue and pulls him in. George lets himself fall slack against him. He feels an arm move down to scoop him up from the knees and he lets himself be carried to the couch. He feels pathetic as he presses his nose into Dream’s chest, trying to bury himself in him.

“I don’t want to go,” he hears himself say as they tangle themselves together.

Dream used to get like this when training got too difficult. One night after he’d returned from attempting to rescue somebody from a house fire, he’d collapsed on top of George and cried himself hoarse. George remembers it every time he smells smoke. The fire wasn’t too big, but Dream had barely been nineteen, had barely had to deal with heat like that before. It was supposed to be an easy task for him, but he’d refused to leave his bed for two days after it happened.

“Don’t like the way the smoke smelt,” Dream had muttered, cheek to George’s stomach. “Didn’t like the way it felt on my skin through the suit.”

When George had gotten Dream on his squadron, he never sent him off to a fire ever again. It’s the one protective thing he’s done that Dream hadn’t complained about.

“We’ll get you back so quickly,” Dream promises, a hand moving up and down George’s back.
“I’m really sorry, George.”

Dream is better than him in this way. George wouldn’t apologize in his position.

“Don’t be,” George finally admits quietly. “It’s probably for the best.”

“C’mon,” Dream goads as he rests his chin on the top of George’s head. “You’re acting like we’re breaking up. You’ll be back before you know it.”

George knows that Dream is just being optimistic, knows he’s just trying to keep his spirits up, but it stings instead of soothes. The worst of him wants Dream to be upset too. He wants to know if Dream will miss him.

“I’m gonna miss you,” Dream says, as if he can read George’s mind. “But I’ll get this mess cleaned up so quickly. Then we can go back to normal.”

George nearly laughs. What normal is there at this point? The normal where they’ll step on each other’s toes and argue until they wear each other down? George doesn’t want to go back to that. He wants for the two of them to enjoy being around each other again. He wants the versions of themselves that wanted to buy a house and live together and work together forever back. The worst part is that it isn’t even Dream that’s changed.

It’s George.

The reason he’s overprotective and overtly defensive is because he can’t kick this stupid crush on Dream to the curb.

“I’m gonna think about you there,” he finally manages to say. “Every single day.”

He almost cringes and tries to laugh it off as some attempt at a joke, but Dream understands the sentiment and doesn’t make fun of him for it.

“Remember last year? We were thinking about getting a house?” George tries as he looks up to observe Dream’s reaction.

Dream’s eyebrows furrow for a moment before his eyes light up in recognition. He laughs.

“Yeah. Yeah, that was good. That was fun.”

George waits for him to ask why they haven’t followed through.

“It’s like I live in your house anyways,” Dream continues. “I’m here so much. It’s like our house.”

It’s a subtle rejection. George tries not to sound too disappointed when he speaks again.

“It’ll be *our* house when you start paying rent,” he reminds Dream.

Dream breathes out a laugh. George feels his shoulders relax as he listens to the humming of the refrigerator start. He wants to stay like this just a little longer, but he knows he has to pack. Dream follows him upstairs into the bedroom, heading to the wardrobe.

“Suitcase?” Dream asks.

“Basement.”

Dream nods and George hears him run off downstairs. He walks over to the bedside, looks at the paraphernalia scattered along it. Movie tickets from two months ago, when he and Dream had gone to see the Wizard of Oz reboot. A Statue of Liberty keychain that he had bought before leaving New York. Dream had a matching one. A rock Dream had picked up from when they had visited the Boulder Flatirons for the first time. Unmarked papers sitting in a neat pile. He wonders what he

is to do about those.

It makes him feel worse about going.

Dream returns and drops the suitcases on the floor. George hears him move across the room as he begins to place shirts in one bag, pants in the other.

“Are you bringing anything sentimental?” Dream asks, tossing George a backpack.

George thinks about it. “No. I’ll be back soon anyways.”

Dream smiles at him, almost beaming. “Yeah? You think so?”

George decides to mess with him. “Obviously.”

“Why’s that?”

“Sapnap’s handling the case,” he says, like it’s obvious.

Dream looks crestfallen for a moment before he realizes what George is doing. “There’s someone else on that team, y’know. That’s not an intern.”

“I do not particularly like Armstrong,” George comments, and Dream crosses his arms. “Okay, yeah. There’s you too, I guess.”

Dream smiles again, heartfelt this time. The moment is soft. George wonders if the two of them will ever get to have anything like this anytime soon again. The fear of Dream moving on, finding new people while he loses his goddamn mind on some ranch is stronger than he would like to admit. They’re the most prevalent individuals in each other’s lives.

What was George going to fill the space with?

“Dream,” George starts, suddenly overcome with panic.

What if he never gets the chance to tell him? What if something goes wrong, and George gets caught up in something, or Dream gets caught up in something, and Dream never gets to find out what he feels for him?

“George,” Dream echoes back to him. “What’s up?”

“I have to tell you something,” George starts.

Dream looks at him with worry. “Is everything okay?”

This is it. He has to tell him.

The words get caught in his throat. He falters. He doesn’t understand what he’s trying to accomplish here. If Dream likes him back by some miracle, or at the very least is willing to give them a try, they’ll have to wait to get together. He doesn’t want Dream to worry while he’s in the safe house. If Dream doesn’t feel the same way, the more likely occurrence, and the two of them decide to just stay friends, Dream will feel guilty and George will feel like he’s ruined their relationship. He shouldn’t feel guilty, but he will. George knows.

It’s okay, he tries to say with his eyes. If you don’t want me, it’s okay. I just need you to know I would do anything for you.

“I just love you,” he announces, unable to pronounce the ‘m’ in *I’m* and sandwich the ‘love’ between ‘in’ and ‘with.’

“George,” Dream says his name fondly. “You’re gonna be back so soon. I promise, okay?”

“Okay,” George agrees.

He thinks back to what Sapnap had said to him about trusting Dream with himself and begrudgingly agrees with his assessment. It is true. George worries whether Dream can handle himself or not, when he knows that he can, despite his recklessness.

“Dream,” George starts. “I think you— you should get hands on with it if you feel like you can do a better job than the tech.”

Dream smiles. “Okay. I’ll try to—I’ll try to use your stuff too, if that’s okay.”

“It’s always okay.”

“Okay.”

Dream waits until the company van comes to the door to whisk George away, hugs him tightly.

“No goodbyes,” Dream insists. “Because you’ll be back so soon.”

“See you later, Dream,” George responds.

Dream smiles, and George tries to commit it to memory. “See you later, George.”

«»

The drive to Montana is ridiculously boring. The driver doesn’t speak to him, and George wasn’t permitted to bring any personal technology. He thinks back to Sapnap as he fiddles with the top button of his shirt. He probably shouldn’t do that— accidentally setting it off would be a very bad idea.

George hasn’t been out of state in a while.

He hadn’t been allowed to bring anything that could remotely trace back to Dream. Armstrong had gone as far as to suggest George not bring anything that could’ve been bought on Dream’s card. He feels as though the distance between the two of them is physically manifesting inside of his chest. Everything burns and there is nothing he can do about it.

He feels so helpless, which is the worst of it all. It’s something he isn’t accustomed to feeling. He’s sure that Dream relates to this too. His best friend is a fucking superhero. He’s a scientific mastermind. What is there for him to worry about? They bend the concept of possibility every single day.

Now he’s been stuck in a van and shipped off to somewhere nobody should be able to find him,

doing paperwork for a company that makes a product he barely even uses anymore. It's a hit to his pride, admittedly. He enjoys his research work, enjoys his hands-on job. Perhaps the burnt out dopamine receptors in his brain will finally get the chance to regain some sensitivity and small victories will start to feel like they mean something again. It's hard to get excited these days.

He feels like he's already forgetting what Dream looks like.

Sapnap has this, he reminds himself. Sapnap is in charge. At least it isn't one of those idiots trying to keep him from getting the Commander position. His heart sinks when he realizes that particular ambition has to go on hold too, until this thing is figured out.

What he can't understand is how he managed to cut himself. Sapnap had a point; why did equipment that was so sensitive and calibrated to perfection, checked by a dozen individuals before it got into the hands of any field worker, able to be bypassed?

Double crosser, he reminds himself. An untrustworthy individual.

He can't think of anyone. He's instructed to sit in the bedroom as the movers bring all the stuff to his living room. He's told he's free to reorganize once they leave.

Who would have something to gain from Dream? Dream ate a healthy amount of the organization's budget—George gave him a hard time for it, but nobody else does work at the caliber Dream does. He doesn't think there's been anyone who has even shown disdain for Dream at the organization ever.

Unless... they wanted to use Dream as leverage for someone else.

George gets allocated Dream's budget because he manages him. If someone wanted leverage over him, supposedly, by attempting to unsuccessfully take Dream's DNA, they were probably assuming he'd react a certain way to that. George would. He'd try and get Dream sent to a safe house, probably take illogical measures to make sure nothing happened. Unless the individual didn't understand how Dream's DNA worked. Unless they'd been attempting to access more funding, putting in requests, inviting organizational heads to personally comment on George's financial management. Without their budget, everything crumbles.

What if it's *George* they actually want gone?

His stomach sinks. He hears the door slam shut and in a moment of impulse he practically tosses himself down the stairs. The moment his hand meets the doorknob, metal pushes through drywall and turns the house into something that looks more like a containment cell.

He hears footsteps coming from the kitchen, hears something that sounds like the safety lock of a gun being taken off. He holds up both his hands and closes his eyes as the individual speaks.

"Hello, George. Fancy seeing you here."

Chapter End Notes

yeah just like fuck all hard scientific logic i guess. but also dream is a wizard here so who the fuck cares.

also george calls the name clever because i thought the name was clever. glowstick

technology is not real but wouldn't it be a fucking sick name if it was. god.
hoping and praying none of you are masters students in any scientific field bc you
could definitely deconstruct all my logic.
i wasn't even supposed to write today but one of my assignments got moved so i
thought yknow what. fuck it. i'm going to write this. this is my favourite thing to write
so i will write it. it feels good i feel like the tension has physically melted off my body.
anyways yes please let me know your thoughts in the comments i love seeing them!!!!
no force. thank u for all the love on the last chapter see you in the next one!!!!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

violence warning for this chapter - in my opinion it isn't graphic, but if anyone feels that way let me know and i'll change the rating + archive warnings

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The footsteps behind him get closer, closer, before he feels the barrel of a gun being pressed between his shoulder blades.

He's always been someone that has had blind faith in his own abilities. He would argue that he sort of *has* to, because there's too much riding on his decisions to entertain moments of uncertainty. Still, believing that he could have hidden his participation level in the mission from the executives? A risky move, on his behalf. But a risky move to protect Dream? Completely predictable of him.

A compromise of identity? A logical happening in this reckless scenario. Relocation in response to that? Completely justifiable. The outcomes of all of this is almost too calculated.

Disguised as a security effort to protect George. George, who protects Dream. A ploy to get George out of the way, leaving Dream unprotected.

George has never felt more like a fucking idiot.

"Surprised you didn't figure this out earlier," the voice says as he feels his hands being yanked behind his back and his wrists being tied together. "But we managed okay. I'd say we even got a bit lucky, yeah?"

George grits his teeth in response. He's forced onto his knees.

"Come on, George, there's no reason you've got to be hostile. The walls are soundproof here too, you can scream if you like. Nobody's going to be able to hear you."

He should have seen this coming. Why would anyone let him get away with such a huge protocol violation, especially if he'd been getting on their nerves steadily the months before?

The person sighs as they remove the gun from his back, but George remains rigid in his posture. He lets himself be maneuvered around to face his captor. There's three people in the room now; all wearing black ski masks and gloves. He can't say he's seen the other two before, but he's confident in the identity of the leader.

"Cut the fuckin' theatrics, Armstrong," George spits, frustration and anger finally taking over.

The man— Armstrong, George is sure— laughs as his accomplices share a look with each other briefly.

"It's okay," the man says as he raises a hand to the top of his head and rips off the ski mask. "It doesn't matter if he knows, he's going to be dead soon anyways."

George's heart sinks to his stomach. He scours his brain for an excuse, for something to say that can buy him some time.

"You're crazy if you think they won't— what do you think will happen when they find my dead body with a bullet through me, dumbass? You think they won't investigate?" George scoffs.

The provocative nature of his statement issues a reaction for a split second. Armstrong looks furious before he regains his composure. George has never particularly liked the man, and he's sure that the feeling is mutual, but he wouldn't ever imagine it being like this. Their relationship is strictly professional; he hadn't done anything to spite him personally.

"You think you're so smart, George," Armstrong starts, pressing the gun into the hollow of George's cheek.

George tenses as he submits underneath the touch of the weapon, sits up straighter as it's pressed against the apple of the bruising cheek in an attempt to escape the touch.

It happens so fast. He hears the bullet before he can comprehend what's going on. George gasps as his eyes squeeze shut and he tries to push himself backwards. He cowers in on himself and waits for something to hurt.

Nothing does.

He opens his eyes to see Armstrong grinning at him like a fucking sociopath, both hands clutched tightly around the grip. The barrel of the gun had been aimed above his head. He tries to think of something to say, but his brain goes foggy with panic.

"Where'd all that bravado go?" Armstrong asks amusedly as he thrusts the hot muzzle of the gun dangerously close to George's face.

George flinches back again, persistent in his attempt to keep himself as unscathed as possible.
"C'mon, Sergeant. Thought you could handle a little trouble."

"Why are you doing this?" George asks, eyes desperately flickering from side to side for something, anything.

"Like I owe you some sort of explanation," Armstrong says with a roll of his eyes, shoving the gun back into the holster. "Don't worry, I don't plan on shooting you."

"How kind," George bites sarcastically.

He watches as the men in the back move behind him to work on something, but he can't see what. Armstrong glances at his watch and frowns, which George does not take as a good sign for himself, so he blurts out the first thing he can think of.

"I know this has to do with Dream."

He needs to get to the second button on his shirt. He doesn't know if it'll end up working, or if the warning will give Sapnap and Dream enough time to get to him, but it's the best shot he has.

"Everything has to do with Dream," Armstrong offers indifferently. "The whole fucking organization revolves around Dream."

George watches as Armstrong walks over to the table, inspecting what looks like a cardboard gas mask.

“We all work to cover for his ass—” he grabs pliers, and adjusts something George can’t see from this angle, “—and he skips off and takes all the fucking glory. I know you hate it.”

George does hate it. He keeps silent.

“You’re happy with being his bitch though,” Armstrong sneers. “Some of us have a fucking backbone.”

George swallows hard, tries to subtly dig his chin into the button of his shirt. He waits for something to snap but it doesn’t.

“What are you doing?”

Armstrong glances at him in an almost disbelief, before his eyes narrow on the second button of George’s shirt.

“What’s that?”

George swallows hard. This is his chance. “Nothing.”

One of the men behind Armstrong, previously silent and passive, pulls a pocket knife from his pocket and moves towards George. Armstrong holds out a hand.

“I don’t want this to be messy.”

The man returns to his spot, watching George with piercing grey eyes.

“Still so stupidly obsessed with him, huh?”

He’s my friend, George answers in his head, refusing to speak out loud. Armstrong doesn’t seem to mind his silence as much this time.

“Well, it was effective,” Armstrong admits. “We’ve been trying to access the data about his DNA for so long, but his father refuses to publicize that information. We thought by hiring you, we could maybe wear you down a little, maybe you’d bend the rules for the pursuit of science. Instead—”

Armstrong slaps him twice this time before backhanding him. George feels a noise of pain escape his throat traitorously.

“— You do nothing except try and keep that fucking *liability* safe.”

His vision spins for a moment.

“That’s my job,” George hisses. “And I’m fucking good at it.”

“Not good enough,” Armstrong laughs. “Because Dream is back in Colorado, and you’re stuck *here.*”

Armstrong lunges forward again and George instinctively flinches back. He feels two fingers clawing at one of the buttons of his shirt and he thrashes around in a panic fruitlessly.

“What’s this?” Armstrong asks as he holds up Sapnap’s device between his fingers.

It needs to break in order to work.

“It’s— it’s a mic, this conversation is taped,” George tries to stutter out, a last desperate attempt to

have something go his way. “You’ll— they’re gonna get you, Armstrong. Why would you—”

This time, the second man steps forward and knocks him across the side of the head with a baton. He screams this time, the blow sending dots of colour dancing across his vision.

“Do you think I’m stupid, George? I sign off on everything your intern does,” Armstrong spits. “The sooner you quit fucking lying, the less painful I’ll make your death.”

George watches through blurred vision, the last of the hope leaving his system as Armstrong places the intact device on the table.

“It was so good before that freak of nature got on the organization’s radar,” Armstrong spits. “I was on the brink of a breakthrough that would have changed lives, George. And then you—” He points an accusatory finger in George’s direction, seething, “—and your fucking lab rat waltzed in, and all my fucking funding went in the water. I begged to be kept in the lab, but they repositioned me as fuckin’ administration.”

George remains silent as Armstrong continues on his tirade, eyes bulging with rage.

“I was so fuckin’ close, that device would have revolutionized bushfire fighting. Cut casualties in half.”

“I never knew,” George tries, but he realized very quickly that this is the wrong thing to say.

Armstrong lands a blow right at his temple, knocking George to the floor. He squirms in an attempt to raise his head, but his hands being tied behind his back make it considerably more difficult.

The room is silent. George tries to regulate his breathing as his lopsided vision spins. He doesn’t know how he could possibly get out of this mess.

“But that’s not why you’re here,” Armstrong finally says. “I don’t—I’m not some monster. I’m not killing you for fun.”

How kind, George wants to say, but being a smartass in this situation doesn’t seem to be paying off all too well.

“I completed my project,” Armstrong says, quieter this time. “Just with a different organization.”

A different organization? Who could possibly be willing to aimlessly fund some scheme Armstrong had come up with?

“They fulfilled their end of the deal, I’m going to fulfill mine,” Armstrong seems like he’s talking more to himself than George now, like he needs to justify what he’s about to do.

Who wants George dead? He racked his brain for ideas and his heart sank at the realization.

The drug ring, probably.

“Yeah, I can see you piecing it all together now,” Armstrong says amusedly.

He’s going to kill me. The will to survive clashes violently against the part of him working to accept his own death. Memories begin to flood his mind, clouding his ability to make a rational judgement.

Something inside of him wants to give up. His shoulders feel like they can’t hold him up any

longer, and his head doesn't feel like it can take any more of what they have planned for him.

He tries his best to shake it off. He needs to live. He has to.

Fear bubbles up in his chest. "What are you going to do to Dream?"

Armstrong looks at him with a sort of annoyance and pity. "Nothing bad, don't you worry. He'll live. But his information will become more easily accessible to more people belonging to the organization. The more people that study him, the more—"

"You're going to get him fucking killed, you morons," George cuts him off, angrily. "That information is kept away from everyone else to reduce the chance of it being part of a data leak, because if someone can somehow figure out a way to control Dream—"

"—They'd have a superhuman soldier on their side," Armstrong finishes, a condescending smile playing on his lips. "Finally caught up?"

The final piece clicks in place.

This is sick. They can't do this, George can't let that happen. He has to get out of this, has to find a way back to Colorado, has to fix all of this now.

"I don't understand why you're doing this," George pleads, voice coming out more panicked than he wishes to convey.

"I want my research funding back, I want a tool that can help me test it, and I want you out of my fucking way!" Armstrong yells to punctuate his last point, stepping forward to land a kick in George's ribs.

Thankfully nothing cracks, but George's vision blurs for a moment.

"If they find I look like I was beaten up, they might investigate my death further," George offers lamely in an attempt to escape further physical harm.

Armstrong laughs. "There's not gonna be enough left of you to investigate."

The words send a shiver down his spine.

"It won't be painful," Armstrong says in his version of a reassuring tone. "We'll put you to sleep before we set the house on fire."

The house on fire. George is going to *burn* to death. His brain catches up with the gravity of the situation as he flails around on the floor in some pathetic attempt to instigate a fight.

"Armstrong, you could've talked to me, I didn't know," George pleads. "I didn't—if I had known, I would've allocated some of my budget to you, but I didn't even—"

"Shut up, George," Armstrong sharply states. "What's dealt with is dealt with."

"It's not! I'm still alive, I'm still here—"

"Not for much longer if you keep screeching," Armstrong seethes.

George can't cry, he won't cry here in front of these people. His eyes still burn so he keeps them closed. Tears roll down his cheeks and he tells himself its instinct, he's not crying, can't cry—

His chest seizes up at the idea of Dream and Sapnap finding what's left of him.

"Armstrong, I never—I didn't—please, there has to be another solution," George tries desperately.

"The damage is done George, quit talking nonsense," Armstrong states matter of factly. "On the way here, I managed to access the data on Dream's DNA, wired it to a biomedical engineer, and have already disabled some of the modifications you've made."

George feels the panic rise higher in his chest. "You can't—please, he's—he didn't do anything!" "Yes he fucking did," Armstrong states in disbelief. "You—you're delusional if you think you can protect him forever, even if you weren't going to die. He's a liability."

"He's a hero!" George says back stubbornly. "He's doing good out there!"

George can feel Armstrong's judgemental eyes piercing through him in an almost unbelieving way. George agrees with the fact Dream is a liability. Dream spends most of his time on George's last fucking nerve. But Dream is good. That's one thing he's certain of. He'd been thrust into such an unforgiving role, and he had been nothing but gracious and devoted to the world around him. He's reckless and impossible to deal with sometimes, and he's made mistakes George will die angry about (sooner than later, he realizes now). But Dream is unequivocally good. An adrenaline junkie, and selfish with glory in small moments, but he's good and deserving of everything good.

"It's a little pathetic, but also a little sweet," Armstrong laughs condescendingly. "I'll let him know you called for him before you died."

"An admission of guilt, cute," George says angrily.

"No, a last thought for him to have with his own brain before I rewire him," Armstrong says, grinning with such malice that George thinks he could break out of these restraints and sock him in the face with nothing but sheer rage fueling him.

"Leave him—that's not—they won't let you do that," George tries, but Armstrong seems to be done with this conversation.

"Don't wanna keep you alive longer than I have to," Armstrong states, pulling the gun back out of the holster. "'What d'you think? Should I shoot him before we light this up?'

He steps closer and George squeezes his eyes closed and prays for some sort of divine intervention, for something to let Sapnap and Dream know that he's in trouble. But that's impossible.

They're all the way back home, and he's here, he's going to die alone.

"Nah," Armstrong decides, seemingly unnerved by the look of despair in George's eyes. "I don't wanna risk a bullet surviving the wreck."

George watches as the men work quickly to clean the space behind him, expertly extracting the refracted segments of the bullet from where they've lodged themselves in the wall and scattered across the floor.

"You won't be conscious when the building burns," Armstrong says as he covers his face with what looks to be a respirator. "It's—yeah. Carbon monoxide. You'll be out in ten minutes. Won't feel a thing afterwards."

"Fuck you," George seethes. "Fuck you, fuck you, Armstrong. You fucking coward. You can't—you won't get away with this!"

"Bye George," is all that he's offered before the walls melt back to normal.

"It's—the temperature of a house fire isn't enough to burn through the material of the security system," George calls desperately.

"High tech instrument malfunction," Armstrong calls as he and the two accomplices leave, and George tries to get to his feet, tries to run out with them, but it feels like his legs have turned to lead and he falls to the ground. He tries to get up again but he can't. He struggles against the ropes binding his hands, uselessly trying to break free, but they're bound too tightly. He needs something else to cut through them with.

But he can't get up.

This is how he dies. He contemplates just accepting defeat, going without a fight, allowing himself a final moment of peace before his vision goes black.

Did Armstrong take Sapnap's device with him?

He cranes his neck towards the table as hot pins and needles prick at his skin. He can't see properly.

It's his only hope. He musters up all his energy and tosses himself at the ground, uses his bound arms to writhe against the carpet towards where he had seen the glow stick device placed last. There isn't a chance they'll be able to make it to him before the carbon monoxide does, but maybe letting them know something went wrong will prompt an investigation of some sort.

Maybe it will, at the very least, provide an opportunity to save Dream from whatever plans they have for him.

When he reaches the table, he sees it. It's there. Armstrong has forgotten it.

He gets on his knees, and knocks his shoulder against the side of the table, trying to knock it to the floor. He hits the side once, twice, three times, before wincing. He holds his breath, trying to cheat death. He feels bile burning at his throat but he refuses to give up.

When he's dead, the pain will mean nothing. Dream being left as nothing more than a tool for these bastards is something he has to fight for even after the oxygen escapes his lungs for the last time.

He's finally successful. It falls to the floor with a clink and he takes it between his teeth without thinking, biting down until he hears a satisfactory crack. He spits it out and watches as it glows blue for a moment, before turning transparent again.

That's a design flaw he should definitely let Sapnap know about. It could draw attention to someone at the wrong time.

It'll have to be someone else who figures it out. George will be dead. It's bittersweet. At the very least, it's not for nothing.

He spent years trying to prevent Dream's death, he didn't even take the time to think about what it would be like to face his own. He falls to the floor, tries his best to console himself in his final moments.

The walls explode. George sees the drywall of the ceiling come crumbling down at him so he closes his eyes. He hears someone call his name above all the commotion.

"George! George, stay—don't fucking move! I'm coming!"

Chapter End Notes

heyy guys :) hope u are all good and that you liked the chapter!!

thank you for all the support and love on the last chapter! super appreciated! u may have noticed i removed the chapter count because i ended up changing the outline a little bit. it's going to be a little longer than originally anticipated

a few people have already found it since my spotify is posted on my twitter but i do have a playlist for this fic if that's something you would like to check out.[PLAYLIST LINK](#)

come talk 2 me about it in the comments if u want haha no force but i love seeing what people are thinking!! am very extrinsically motivated for fic writing lol so!! feel free to say hi

thank u so much for reading as always, see you in the next one! :)

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George wakes up to bright fluorescent lights and the beeping of a heart monitor.

He's confused for a moment, blinking several times in an attempt to unblur his vision. A doctor peers over at him and raises her eyebrows in shock, before she calls for someone else to come over. He tries to speak but they urge him not to. He feels himself being tugged into a sitting position. A wave of nausea washes over him. A bucket is placed in front of him before he throws up the limited contents of his stomach.

After he's finished, a hand wipes his mouth with a damp towel before lying him back down. Another hand reaches out and places an oxygen mask over his mouth, before he feels himself lose consciousness again.

The next time he wakes up, he's starving.

"He's awake," he hears somebody say. "You can— I'm suggesting you keep *him* outside, but you can go in and see him."

George tries to stretch his neck to see who's at the door but a nurse stops him.

"Try not to move around, okay?" he pleads. "You're okay to speak, but drink some water first."

A water bottle is brought to his lips for a brief second and George gulps it down.

"Hungry," is the first word he manages to say.

Footsteps draw closer, closer, before someone arrives at his bedside.

"Hey, George," Sapnap says gently, offering him a small smile. "How're you holding up, buddy?"

The previous events come crashing back to him all at once. Armstrong, the safehouse, Dream's chip being supposedly hacked.

"We gotta— Dream—" George starts, before Sapnap hushes him.

"Dream's alright," Sapnap promises. "He's outside that door, he's all bandaged up, don't worry."

George is confused. "Bandaged up?"

Sapnap nods. "We got there just in time with a squadron, they caught a bunch of people at the scene as the safe house blew up."

"But why is Dream injured?" George asks, blinking a few times to clear his vision.

Sapnap swallows hard. "Well, we didn't expect the safehouse to blow."

"That's crazy," George says flatly. "Neither did I."

Sapnap looks at him in disbelief, before the both of them burst out into laughter. George feels something fond bloom in his chest. Sapnap doesn't take things too seriously when George doesn't take things too seriously. It's a good thing they have going on. He reminds himself to appreciate him more.

"Dream dove in after you," Sapnap says after a moment.

Panic swells in George's chest. "What?"

"Don't worry, he managed to use his telekinesis long enough to keep all the debris in the air before he did that, but he took a bit of physical damage. When we got the crew to go looking for him, we found him like—planked over you. So both of you went into emergency care, but he was conscious, so there wasn't too much to worry about."

Dream dove in to save him.

"He's alright," Sapnap continues. "You know him. Engineered to withstand—"

"He almost died," George says dumbly.

Dream jumped in after George. Dream risked his life to save him. The thought is touching and agonizing at the same time. George isn't sure if he wants to grab him by the shoulders and shake him angrily, or if he wants to burst into tears and crawl into his arms and never leave.

Dream almost died trying to save him. The guilt stabs around violently inside of his ribcage.

"Don't blame yourself," Sapnap says sternly, because he knows George's brain. "Nobody knew what was happening."

George's thoughts catch up to him again. "Armstrong—"

"—In custody," Sapnap finishes. "Found him and a bunch of other guys. They did a whole investigation of the precinct, but nobody else turned up in ours, luckily."

George exhales. "I wanna see Dream."

Sapnap hesitates. "Well, there's a bit of a problem."

He pauses to smile at another doctor who walks up next to them, placing a tray of food next to George.

"Dream goes—I don't know how to put this, but he gets a little—he got up three hours before you, and we let him in here, and he sorta—He saw you hooked up to all the machines, because y'know, carbon monoxide poisoning—"

"What happened?" George blurts out, cutting him off.

"He freaked the hell out," Sapnap admits. "There was—apparently, we heard that the building you were in was supposed to get lit on fire, and he was already worked up about that *before* he jumped in to get you. And then he was stuck there underneath everything for like, twenty minutes, with your unconscious body, and he was yelling when we pulled him out."

George is silent.

"He's had similar missions under similar conditions where he hasn't broken a sweat, but y'know, I guess having it be someone you know and you love makes it a lot harder," Sapnap finishes.

Cotton expands in George's throat as he tries his best not to cry. This experience has been a mess. He wants to call the case off and go home, take a shower. He wants to pretend none of it happened, wants to curl up on the couch next to Dream and watch The Property Brothers, wants to make fun of the statement pieces on the banquets that they choose, fall asleep tangled up in each other.

"I wanna see Dream," George repeats. "Please."

"The doctors won't let him in," Sapnap repeats. "He gets really panicked when he sees you like this."

"I'm fine," George insists, turning around to flag a doctor. "Please, let me— can you let me see him?"

The doctor, a man in his forties, hesitates. "We were told not to let Dream in."

"You have to," George pleads. "Please, I need to see him."

The panic begins to climb into his lungs, seems to magnify every time he inhales and exhales.

"Okay sir, we can— we'll check his condition, and if he's stable we'll see," the man tries to soothe him, but it isn't enough.

He wants Dream here, he needs to check his chip.

"The chip," George gasps. "Sapnap, Dream's chip—"

"—is already fixed," Sapnap finishes, gently pushing down on George's shoulders in an attempt to get him to lie down. "George, you need to relax, or they won't let you see Dream."

Frustration bubbles in his chest. He feels like he's being very unfairly treated like a child right now, but Sapnap has the decency to look apologetic.

He lets the doctors do their thing as Sapnap takes a seat a few steps away from him. He eats and drinks what they tell him to, complies with every order. After what feels like years, but Sapnap informs him has only been seventy four minutes, the door swings open.

Dream is standing there; arms bandaged, a plaster stuck above one of his eyebrows, a concerned look on his face. When his eyes meet George's, it feels like time stops.

I missed you, George wants to yell in excitement, hop out of bed and into his arms. *It's barely been a day, but it feels like it's been years.*

He doesn't think that it would bode too well for him. The doctors would probably force Dream out and start reassessing him at the first signs of deliriousness, but he supposes medicine doesn't take how fucking stupid Dream makes him act into consideration when drawing conclusions.

He wrinkles his nose, disgusted by his own thought process.

Dream walks in, slowly, offering a sheepish look to some of the doctors. When he finally gets to George's bedside, he glances at Sapnap, who takes it as his cue to leave.

There's nobody but them in this room. And six medical personnel, but George supposes they've seen so much that this doesn't as much as make them bat an eye.

"Hey," Dream says softly as he sits down on the edge of George's bed, placing his hand against his forehead. "How're you feeling, baby?"

The casual slip up nearly sends him into hysterics.

Dream used to call George baby during the first few weeks they'd moved here, since they were so codependent. It started as a joke, but then ended up infiltrating its way into real conversation. George had made the conscious choice to stop saying it as much when he started to develop real feelings for Dream, and it had sort of died off then.

"I'm sorry, didn't mean to upset you," Dream says worriedly when George just stares up at him with glossy eyes. "I'm sorry."

George can't believe that Dream is apologizing right now, out of all times. There have been plenty of incidents where he should've done that, but sure enough, he only seems to remember to do so after he's saved George's life. Dream's hands cup George's face delicately as he leans in closer, and George's heart skips a beat because for a moment he thinks he's going to kiss him.

Instead, Dream just presses their foreheads together.

George pushes him up, determined to give him a piece of his mind.

"You," George whispers furiously. "You saved my fucking life."

Dream turns pink. "It's not— c'mon, George, who's keeping score?"

"Shut up," George whispers as the tears roll down his cheeks. "You jumped into— what the fuck is wrong with you, Dream?"

"I didn't think," Dream responds like it's easy. "I heard you were in there, and they— they said they didn't have any machines to get to you in time, so they were going to wait and see if they could rescue you after the house collapsed, but how was I supposed to sit there and let that happen?"

"It would've been fine," George insists, even though he knows it wouldn't have.

"I love you," Dream blurts out.

George swallows hard, presses their foreheads together another time.

"I love you," Dream breathes out again, the words warm against George's cheek. "I love you, I love you so much."

George wants to kiss him, but it doesn't feel like it'll be enough. Dream presses his cheek to George's cheek with fervour, like he thinks George will dissolve beneath him if he doesn't hold on tight.

"I thought I *lost* you," Dream repeats, voice cracking down the middle of the sentence. "We were — I was there, and then—"

A doctor interrupts the two of them by pulling Dream backwards. "Please refrain from discussing stressful topics, his heart rate is climbing."

George flushes red as Dream stutters out an apology, settling for simply holding his hand instead.

"I'll tell you once you're better," Dream promises.

George nods, closes his eyes at the feeling of Dream running his thumb over his knuckles. "Do you think they'll let me home tonight?"

“Probably, but you’ll have to take the underground route to a second location before you go,” Dream tells him.

Everything is supposedly taken care of. Armstrong is supposedly in custody, Dream’s chip is supposedly fixed. Dream is okay. Everything is okay.

“How’d you find me?” George asks. “I—I only barely managed to use the glow stick thing Sapnap gave me.”

“It wasn’t that,” Dream informs him. “But I’ll tell you the details at your place tonight.”

It’s a given that Dream would spend the night after something like this, but it doesn’t mean that George can’t be excited about it.

“We’ll get pizza,” Dream continues. “But they’re thinking of stationing someone outside for the first few days, just until they wrap up the case.”

“It’s done?”

Dream smiles at him. “Yeah. It’s— just tying up loose ends, but we got everyone we were supposed to.”

George frowns. “How?”

“Sapnap,” Dream starts, and George stares at him in disbelief.

“He did not solve a case I’ve been working on for weeks in a few hours,” George states. “I’m never going to hear the end of this.”

Dream laughs fondly. “No, it wasn’t— just get some rest. I’ll be here.”

“You,” George asks suddenly. “How’re *you* doing?”

Dream looks at him for a moment like the question is absurd. “I’m doing fine.”

George can’t believe him. “You saved my life. You could’ve died.”

“I didn’t,” Dream waves off, before he stands up and goes to grab a chair.

“Don’t,” George tells him, leaning forward to grab his arm. “Just— can you be here with me?”

Dream glances around to see if the staff have any complaints about this. George nearly scoffs, because Dream has literally never given a fuck about what he is and isn’t allowed to do. When he’s met with none, he motions for George to scoot over and takes his place next to him.

“Don’t roll over while you sleep,” Dream instructs, and George rolls his eyes again.

“You’re so stupid,” George says as he places his head on Dream’s chest.

Dream’s fingers card through his hair, and George tries his best to forget. He thinks about this in a different circumstance; pretends that he and Dream are sitting at home after a long day, and that everything is fine.

“You move around so much,” Dream defends himself. “You’re worse than I am.”

“It’s hard to get comfortable!”

“You just want me to hold you,” Dream retorts, and the doctor glances over at the two of them from behind the vitals monitor.

George wants to spontaneously combust. This is so embarrassing.

“Stop making this—we’re fully grown adults,” George whispers.

“Cuddling in a hospital bed,” Dream laughs back, before pulling George closer.

Everything is fine, he reminds himself. They’ll go home, and everything will be okay.

“Did they use the blue gauze for your wounds?” George asks, but Dream shushes him.

“Sleep, George.”

He glances around, before sighing. It doesn’t seem like he’s getting any answers before tonight. George closes his eyes.

When they get home—to George’s house, Dream stands at the coat rack for an abysmally long time.

“Dream?” George asks softly, and Dream falls out of his trance.

“Sorry,” Dream mutters, quieter now that they’re alone.

George doesn’t quite understand that. “Is everything okay?”

Dream doesn’t answer right away. George wonders what he’s thinking about.

“Yeah,” Dream finally says. “Just— yeah. It didn’t—it all happened so fast. It just sank in that like, without—I don’t know. I’m glad you’re here.”

Dream looks at him soberly, like he’s still trying to piece together everything that had just gone on. George motions for him to come closer. They sit down together on the couch.

“I just—I was trapped underneath all the fucking—the house beams had collapsed and stuff, on top of us. And I was on top of you. I was so scared I’d like, crush you.”

George waits for him to continue.

“It just—I wanted to originally go in and get close enough to just like—” Dream pauses, holding out a hand towards the top of George’s fridge, watches as a cereal box zooms out into his hands, “—like just, get you out of there, but there wasn’t enough time.”

George nods, watches as Dream begins to peel the coloured layer of the cardboard of the flap backwards, to reveal the thinner layer of paper beneath.

“—Sapnap was like—he was so good in there, he told two of the cars to drive south, grab anyone nearby with like—I don’t even know. I wasn’t thinking about getting them. I was just thinking about getting you.”

George averts his gaze, swallowing down the thick emotion bubbling inside of him again.

“We found you because Sapnap was suspicious of Armstrong,” Dream admits. “We didn’t have clearance to follow you, but we did it anyway.”

George cracks a smile. “Any excuse to break protocol for you.”

Dream doesn’t seem to take it very lighthearted, because tears begin to well up in his eyes. “I thought you were going to be safe there. I got you sent there, I’m sorry—”

“Dream,” George cuts him off, placing a hand on both of his cheeks. “Dream, don’t do that.”

“But it *is*, ” Dream says back, pulling George in closer. “I was—I thought it was safe, and then I told Sapnap that I did it after you left and he freaked out, said you might be in danger. And I’d have to—I would’ve killed you.”

“Don’t do that,” George says softly. “Don’t—it happens with this job, Dream. It’s not—I wouldn’t blame you for that, even if I did—”

“Don’t,” Dream says sharply, sniffling as he uses the back of his hand to wipe his nose. “I don’t—can we not—unless you wanna—”

“I’m not gonna talk about it,” George tells him. “Go—I’ll put the pizza in the microwave, go wash your face, okay? We’ll—we’ll pretend it didn’t happen.”

Dream takes one good long look at him, like he’s trying to memorize the way he looks right now. George’s heart skips a beat stupidly. Dream finally relents and trudges towards the bathroom, while George heads into the kitchen.

George wonders what he would’ve regretted most if he had died.

Maybe being a bit of a hardass sometimes. He knows he’s difficult, but it’s because he wants the best for people. Sapnap had to deal with that the most out of everyone. When they’d invited him over tonight, he’d refused, said he wanted to finish the paperwork for the case and that he’d stop by tomorrow.

He pulls out his phone, opens his texts with Sapnap.

He thinks about leaving him a nice message. Instead, he finds himself typing out a complaint about how the device he had given him had flashed before it had disappeared. He backspaces that too, afraid of how the joke might read.

It’s something he has to express in person, he decides, sliding the phone back into his pocket. When they sat down and debriefed whatever the hell had happened, put together the entire account, they’d talk.

Dream.

He thinks he would have regretted not telling him how he felt the most out of everything. He’s got to come clean about it at some point. It isn’t like Dream is cruel enough to make a fool out of him for it. They’ve always been close. George thinks it would have been inevitable anyways.

He doesn’t let himself venture into the unknown territory of what if Dream wants him back. He doesn’t trust himself to not make a convoluted mess of their relationship by trying to comb through their interactions, looking for proof of something that he’s not sure exists.

For now, he has this.

Dream flicks through the channels, brow furrowed in focus. George stays quiet as he sits himself down next to him, places a hand delicately over the bandaged part of his arm.

"I hate the— the blue thing they did to the wall," Dream says, motioning towards the television.

George nods, letting himself sit closer than he would usually dare.

"Love you," Dream mutters again, pulling George closer, resting his chin on the top of his head.

"I love you too," George whispers, hoping Dream doesn't catch the way the words get caught in his throat on the way out.

Chapter End Notes

they r so cringe.

"i LoVe YoU" shut up

anyways sorry for threatening to kill george on twitter i was on a bit of a power trip.
here is chapter <333333 hope you all like it, and would love to see your thoughts in
the comments (ik i have been a little slow at replying so apologies for that things are
just busy rn) but i read them all and giggle and kick up my legs like a silly lovestruck
teenager

just so u know.

okay jokes aside thank you for reading and for your continued patience :) see you in
the next one

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When he's permitted back into the office a week and a half later, Dream insists on being the one who drives them to work.

"Let me get you coffee," Dream says as he pulls into the drive-through.

George opens his mouth to object, but Dream is already rolling down the window and asking for two caramel macchiato and two breakfast sandwiches. He waves away George's hand when he tries to offer his card, and insists on treating them.

"It's not a big deal," George says as Dream hands him his part of the order. "If I got you breakfast every single time you almost died, we'd be here every day."

Dream laughs at his joke, but doesn't address the rest of it.

He's been so tense as of late; coming over to George's as soon as he's finished with work, even taking a day off from being on the field to stay home and learn how to work one of George's drones. George knows there's something seriously wrong when he walks into the living room to check on Dream, and he's taking notes on how to work the thing.

Dream hadn't required the same amount of time that George did to heal. He was clocking back in after the weekend, but insisted on living with George. The tension in his shoulders never goes away, and George worries that if he keeps frowning all the time, he's going to develop premature wrinkles.

"I don't blame you," George finally says in the silence of the car, reaching out to place a hand delicately on Dream's thigh.

Dream's leg jerks in surprise, before he turns his head to briefly glance at George.

"I mean it," George repeats softly. "I don't— what happened wasn't your fault."

Still, Dream looks like he wants nothing more than to melt into the floor to avoid this conversation.

"I put you in danger," Dream finally settles on saying. "I'm sorry, George. I shouldn't have gone behind your back—"

"I went behind your back first," George points out. "So you had every right to be angry."

Dream looks conflicted at this presentation of new information. George watches him swallow before he chooses his next words.

"You were just trying to protect me."

George could laugh. He supposes that's all the two of them have ever done. Even though they've been horrible to each other as of recently in their attempts to do it.

"Well, so were you," George tells him. "So stop feeling bad for me. This is part of the job."

Dream looks over at him and smiles softly. “I love you.”

“I know,” George responds, trying to ignore the way his heart squeezes painfully in his chest at the words. “I love you too.”

Just not the same way.

When they arrive at the entrance and go through the security check, he’s surprised to see Sapnap alongside a team of people standing at his desk. Dream coughs loudly as they walk into the foyer, and they move to look at him. The room is silent for a moment, before a few scattered claps are heard.

The applause grows louder, and he hears a few people call out his name. Dream wraps an arm around his shoulder and looks to him proudly, before motioning for him to walk forward.

The crowd shuffles around to reveal Donavan, who offers George a tight lipped smile. “How are you doing, Commander?”

The crowd watches George with an intensity that confuses him. “I’m alright, thank you. Is there anything that has to be signed off on my end in regards to the testimonies, or am I good to start on my other cases?”

He hadn’t sat at home and done nothing. As soon as he was able to muster up the energy, he had volunteered all of the information he had in regards to Armstrong’s motives, what breaches could have possibly occurred. It turned out there was a great exaggeration of the amount of information that had been leaked. George had been removed from the file, and it had been handed off to a larger branch to deal with for security reasons. He was still expected to come in and cooperate with authorities in the legal investigation to ensure that everyone was put away, but the weight had been taken off his shoulders.

It feels like a cop-out. George is sure that under any other circumstance, he wouldn’t have backed off so easily, but if he fights for the case, it means Dream and Sapnap will have to work on it too. The increased security measures around his house are already a headache to deal with.

They settle on keeping George involved with the vague timeline of things, but decide against providing him intimate details in the future to prevent putting him in further danger.

Donavan regards him with curiosity. “No, that will be all, Commander.”

George blinks, before nodding. “Okay.”

He looks to Sapnap, who crosses his arms.

“What?”

“Congratulations,” Dream finally says, grinning as he places a hand on his shoulder.
“Commander.”

Commander. *Commander.*

The rest of the precinct begins to slowly clap again, as George turns to Donavan, who holds out his uniform jacket. Sure enough, two neat gold lines are stitched above the arrows on his sleeve.

He can’t think of a single intelligible thing to say at the moment in thanks. Sapnap, detecting his confusion, begins to lead a chant asking for a speech.

“Okay, okay,” George says, motioning for everyone to quiet down. “This is— wow.”

A few people laugh, Dream included.

“Thank you,” George starts. “For entrusting me with this position.”

They stare at him eagerly as encouragement to continue. George doesn’t have much else to say.

“Say something more, give us something to think about,” Sapnap calls.

Oh, George will give him something to think about, alright.

“It’s important you take the things you want,” George starts. “Even if somebody else says you shouldn’t.”

He feels so ridiculously awkward, but his colleagues look genuinely invested in what he has to say.

“Sometimes, you’re going to make the wrong call,” he continues. “And people will get hurt. Sometimes, you’re going to feel like it’s your fault.”

He can feel Dream’s eyes on him.

“You’ll fuck up, but you still have to keep going. You shouldn’t let yourself get in the way of doing things you want to do.”

A few murmurs are heard across the group, seemingly in agreement. Donavan tells George that they’ll officially present him with his stripes when he is announced with his position at a ceremony happening two weeks from now. As everyone begins to resume their activities, George motions for Dream and Sapnap to follow him into a conference room.

“You made it,” Sapnap says in the privacy of the space, quieter, prouder. “Congratulations, George. Nobody deserves it more.”

“Oh, come on,” George laughs. “You— you saved my ass back there, both of you. I wouldn’t even be here to accept it if it wasn’t for you.”

“Well, yeah,” Sapnap admits with a smile. “But seriously, you did so well for someone who doesn’t have mission training. It’s impressive.”

“And you’ll never have to do that again,” Dream rushes in to add.

They work in silence, enjoying each other’s company, occasionally pausing from their tasks to talk to each other. Sapnap and George coordinate case details for the next thing they’ll be working on, while Dream chips away at his virtual mechatronic structure module.

“It’s actually quite cool,” Dream admits halfway through the videos. “I don’t know if— I probably won’t end up using most of them, but it’s cool.”

George sits down next to him after he wraps up his paperwork, places his head on Dream’s shoulder as he watches the words on the screen pass by. Dream’s hands find their way to his wrists; still wrapped with gauze to prevent the skin from brushing against any unpleasant surfaces.

“How’s it feeling today?” Dream asks.

George shrugs. “It’s alright. Still a little bruised.”

Dream nods, thinks for a moment, and nods again before he looks back to the screen.

George wishes he could read his mind in moments like this. Sapnap interrupts the two of them, motioning for George to sign off on something. He pulls George outside for a moment after.

“So...” Sapnap starts, glancing back into the room. “What’s... I didn’t want to ask him, because I feel like if I even breathe wrong he’ll burst into tears.”

“I’m worried,” George admits. “I don’t know he’s so upset about this, it’s just— like, it could have been much worse. I think he did great.”

Sapnap sighs. “He’s being— honestly, George, I kind of understand.”

George watches in horror as Sapnap’s eyes begin to well up with tears.

“We thought— honestly, the fact that we found you was more luck than actual skill on our behalf. It’s just like— what if we didn’t—”

“Sapnap,” George restates in disbelief. “It’s not— you got there in time.”

“But we nearly didn’t!”

“But you did,” George affirms, holding out his arms. “Come here.”

Sapnap looks the smallest he’s ever been. George curses himself for not taking the time to talk to him more seriously during his time off. He’d been over plenty of times, and the two of them had treated the event like it had been nothing. He’d walked Sapnap through some of his homework, talked to him about how he’d feel returning for a part time position next semester, since things were getting busier for him.

Sapnap steps into his arms and lets out a heavy sob. George runs a hand up and down his back in an attempt to soothe. It’s easy to forget that he’s not as trained as he and Dream are; a lot of this still being so new to him.

“I’m right here,” George restates. “Nobody’s getting rid of me anytime soon.”

“It’s just— it kind of hit me right then. All of it— how many times Dream almost dies—”

“Dream won’t die—”

“He *could*, George. I never thought about it before, because you always know what you’re doing when it comes to him, but then you were there and we were here, and we had no fucking idea what to do.”

“And you still figured it out,” George points out, pulling away to look at him. “It’s not— don’t do that to yourself, trust me. It’ll burn you out.”

Sapnap nods as he uses the heel of his palm to wipe away his tears.

“But still,” George continues. “If you find yourself feeling like that— seriously, I don’t care if I’m pissed at you, or if it’s the middle of the night, or anything. Call me. We can talk about it.”

“Yeah,” Sapnap breathes out, offering George a watery smile. “Okay. Sorry—”

“Don’t apologize,” George affirms. “There’s— there’s always something we can do for you. There’s counsellors here if you don’t want to talk to me or Dream, or we can even get something external set up.”

“I know,” Sapnap says, before clearing his throat. “I read the orientation booklet.”

George scoffs. “Loser.”

And just like that, the tension dissolves. They’re laughing.

It’s always been easy like that with Sapnap. Clear separations between personal and professional, easy to find opportunities to work out discrepancies when the two begin to blend together.

With Dream, it’s never been that simple.

“He told me something while we were driving there to get you,” Sapnap says, motioning with his chin towards Dream. “I think you two should talk about your leases being up soon.”

George feels his blood run cold for a second. “I thought he didn’t want to move in together.”

“You two sure do a lot of thinking about each other,” Sapnap groans. “I wish you’d just fucking talk instead of all this speculating.”

George rolls his eyes as the two of them walk back in. Dream looks up at the two of them, and smiles.

“Everything okay?”

George takes a seat across from him again, Sapnap on his right. “Yeah, it’s all good.”

They settle back into comfortable silence. It feels like some sort of semblance to normal.

«»

Dream is the one that brings it up. They’re in George’s kitchen, some sports game going on in the background as they try their hand at making homemade pasta.

“Have you started looking at new houses?”

George swallows hard before nodding. “Yeah, they gave me a few to pick from actually. Donavan and them— they want to upgrade my security, but it’s not installable, has to be built in. You?”

Dream nods, reaching for a rolling pin. “Not really. I was thinking about getting a roommate, but then I didn’t want to have to hide the whole—” Dream pauses just so he can extend a hand and open the fridge door telekinetically.

George rolls his eyes. “You can say telekinesis instead of demonstrating it every single time.”

“But where’s the fun in that?” Dream guffaws. “But, yeah. I don’t know. Don’t like living alone.”

“Hm,” George says.

He’s confident Dream is trying to get him to ask, but he doesn’t feel like being particularly cooperative. Instead he walks over to check on the boiling water, drops three spoons of salt into the pot.

"It would be nice to live with someone," Dream repeats, walking up close behind him, wrapping his arms around George's waist loosely in a way that feels unfair.

George can't do this. Not when they're like this; playing house, touching each other like it's second nature. At least when they were fighting, he'd have some sort of reason to give as to why he has to keep Dream at a distance. There's nothing he can use as a defense now.

"What are you trying to say?" George asks, trying to keep his heart rate steady.

"You know what I'm trying to say," Dream says, removing his hands. "Be careful, it's hot."

George snorts. "I know that."

They finish cooking dinner in silence. George pauses to dip his thumb into the flour and grazes it against Dream's cheek, laughs at the way he closes his eyes and scrunches his nose.

"George," Dream groans, gently moving his hand out of the way. "Let me move in with you."

There it is.

George had wanted to hear him ask for so long, but he takes a moment to think. Realistically speaking, he and Dream are not going to end up getting together. They're best friends, Dream has never expressed any sort of particular desire to be anything more. He can't start a house with him; shared washing powder, have their wardrobes melt together, come *home* to each other, without leaving the door open to potential emotional wreckage on his behalf.

Because Dream will find out someday. George will end up telling him in a moment of impulse, and it'll ruin everything.

He thinks back to almost dying, thinks of all the things he would have regretted leaving unsaid. He looks to Dream, and something washes over him.

"You don't have to if you don't want to," Dream backtracks. "I—I'm sorry, I didn't mean to overstep, I know you're big on keeping work and personal separate—"

"It's not—that's not the reason I'm hesitant—" George cuts him off. "It isn't—honestly, Dream, at this point, we're just everywhere with each other. Don't think we're having much luck trying to separate the two."

Dream takes in a breath, observes George. "Okay. I get it."

"I want—Dream, I want to move in with you, but there's just a bit of—there's just one thing. As soon as I get it sorted, I'll let you know, okay?" George attempts to remedy the situation.

Dream looks disappointed, but like he's desperately trying not to show it. "Okay, I understand."

"It's not you," George reassures. "It's not—the problem's with me, I promise."

Dream nods, and George hates himself for ruining the moment.

He has to tell Dream one day. Ignoring it hasn't done any good, trying to get rid of it has been going even poorer.

When they're eating dinner in front of the television, pressed up next to each other, George thinks what the version of him that almost died on the floor of the safehouse would say to him.

He closes his eyes and tries not to inhale in an attempt to recreate the sensation. The burning

begins in the middle of his chest, before his head begins to feel light. He thought that Dream was going to die, and that he was going to die, and that he would never get to know just how deep what George felt for him ran.

Dream turns to him after a little. “Are you alright?”

George inhales deeply, exhales, repeats. “Yeah.”

“Why’re you holding your breath?”

George glances around the room, looking for an excuse. “Movie’s intense.”

“We’re watching Clueless,” Dream rebuttals.

George doesn’t really have a clever answer to that. “It’s intense.”

Dream rolls his eyes, but he smiles while doing it. “Okay. You need anything?”

George shakes his head no, before shifting to bury himself in the warmth of Dream’s sweatshirt. He feels him laugh and tighten his arms around him, and George feels safest.

He breathes along with the rise and fall of his chest, something about it stirring a need to be closer, even closer than he already is. He’ll tell Dream, he will, but he feels like he deserves the stability of this moment before he risks everything he holds dear.

Dream’s hand moves up and down his back. Neither of them are paying particular attention to the movie anymore, and George looks up as he opens his mouth to tell him.

“I love you.”

Dream smiles at him softly. “I love you too.”

It’s a cop out, he’s aware. They’ve been saying it way more frequently since the event, more than they probably have in all the other years they’ve known each other.

It still means just as much every single time.

Sleep hangs over his head, and he’s sure that Dream feels it too because he lies the two of them down. The light of the television illuminates the living room.

Dream and George fall asleep, wrapped up in each other, safe.

Chapter End Notes

tysm for reading :) would love to know your thoughts in the comments

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Him and Dream begin to settle back into their old rhythm. It's easier without such a large case to manage. Dream gets a car, and George goes with him to the dealership to haggle with the salesman. They're working late tonight, George sat at the dining room table trying to work out the logistics of their next stakeout, while Dream paces the kitchen.

"Joanne is retiring," Dream tells him.

"Who?"

"Joanne," Dream repeats. "The receptionist."

"Oh," George says, still not looking away from his screen. "I haven't really spoken with her. I'll be sure to drop by and say congratulations."

"Don't," Dream scowls. "She's a bitch."

"Why's she a bitch?"

"She's always on my ass about running in the halls," Dream flexes his fingers in front of his face as he speaks.

George laughs. "That's kind of sweet, actually."

Dream grumbles about how it actually isn't, because it eats up time to have pointless conversations about office etiquette and safety when he throws himself into the maw of danger every single day for the good of the public. George makes fun of him, but he doesn't seem to notice, continuing on his tirade against the rules of the bureau.

"Armstrong is getting sent to court," Dream informs him. "The agency says you might have to testify."

George groans and throws his head back. "I'm tired of talking about what happened."

"His defence lawyers are going to try and play up the fact you got a promotion right after his arrest," Dream continues. "So here."

He walks over to his backpack, strewn half haphazardly over the couch, and pulls out a brown folder containing a hefty amount of papers. He returns to George and drops it over his keyboard.

"What's this?" George asks, opening it up to take a look.

His eyes scan over the first page, before he flips to the next, and the next, and the next. The first case he had ever worked on, followed by a list of his findings and research. His position, his title, the dates of when he earned his first promotion.

"It's your entire working history," Dream states matter of factly. "All your accomplishments, the stuff you found on your own, the role you played in each operation. If you flip to the last page, there's a list of average ages and accomplishments before reaching each post—you're younger than the median and more decorated. So there's no way they can—"

George doesn't let him finish, just gets to his feet and launches himself into Dream's arms. Dream stumbles backwards, clearly taken by surprise, but returns the hug with a laugh.

"Thank you," George whispers, a strong, indescribable sense of gratitude washing over him.

"Woah, didn't know this was all it took," Dream says back, a smile evident in his voice. "All I have to do is show you some bar graphs, and you're horny for me?"

George rolls his eyes and forces himself not to laugh, because he doesn't want to give him the satisfaction. "At least take me to dinner first."

"I've been trying," Dream jokes, and George wants to stay like this forever.

Unfortunately, he can't. So he peels himself off Dream and situates himself back at his computer, punching numbers into a program in hopes that one of the combinations returns the desired answer.

"Remember when we first moved here, and we did all that touristy shit," Dream starts, taking the seat across from him.

Twenty four, thirty two, four. Invalid.

"Yeah," George starts. "It was fun."

Seventy seven, eight, eight. Invalid.

"I miss it," Dream continues. "Just going out and doing things. We've both been so busy."

Nine, ninety, eleven. Invalid.

"We have," George agrees. "We should do something like that again, sometime soon."

"Let's go tomorrow," Dream seems to have already decided. "To the Flatirons."

"That's a lot of walking," George groans, as the two other codes he puts in turn out invalid as well.
"We could go to the city."

"I wanna get away from the noise," Dream tells him. "It's nice there, we'll have fun, c'mon."

George sighs, finally pushing his laptop away and pressing his cheek against the hardwood table, glancing upwards at Dream.

Returning back to their natural dynamic is fun. George had missed it for ages. Now that it's here, he resents it more than anything, because it's a reminder of what they are; just friends, nothing more. Dream can hit on him without being embarrassed of it because he knows the possibility of them dating is absurd. George can touch him and be close to him in a way that's easy because there's no clear boundaries between them, they've always just sort of belonged to each other. It's great, because Dream is his better half, his life partner even without the romantic context.

It just sucks that the possibility of them ever being together is downright laughable.

"Okay," George says. "We should go."

Dream smiles at him, pearly white teeth glistening under the kitchen lights, and *George is so in love with him* it sends a pang of aching through his chest.

"Missed this," George admits quietly. "I feel like we've just been at each other's throat for the

longest time.”

Dream nods once, twice. “It’s been stressful.”

They both know that’s not the truth. It’s because George has been withdrawn, trying to preserve whatever he can of himself for when the inevitable crash and burn ruins the best thing in his life, and Dream’s been more reckless than usual, and George doesn’t know how to separate what he feels from the work he has to do anymore. He’s exhausted.

“People that get kidnapped can develop memory issues, and anxiety and stuff, after it happens,” Dream starts. “And I just wanted you to know that I’m here for you. If you wanted to talk about it.”

“That’s sweet,” George tells him. “You know I already tell you everything.”

Almost everything.

“Yeah, but,” Dream hesitates. “It’s so—I don’t know. They almost killed you, George. I’m over every day because I can’t sleep at night without knowing that you’re here, and that you’re safe.”

Guilt pools up in the bottom of George’s stomach. “Sorry.”

“No,” Dream shakes his head in frustration. “It’s not your fault, it’s just—like, how are you fine?”

“I don’t think there’s anything worth worrying about,” George insists. “Armstrong is for sure going to jail. I got the commander position I wanted. I have you with me all the time. There’s nothing left for me to worry about.”

Except us.

“That’s fair,” Dream admits. “I think all the stuff from before is just catching up to me.”

George offers him a sympathetic look. “Want to talk about it?”

Dream looks at him sadly. “Maybe later.”

They go back to their tasks, George pushing in the numbers almost mindlessly. He speaks again after a while.

“Have you decided?”

Dream looks at him in confusion.

“About moving in together,” George clarifies, trying to keep his voice level as the nerves in his chest squeeze.

It’s one thing to always be over, but it’s another to live with each other. George tries to picture it; a grocery list on the fridge that Dream will never remember to fill out, shared laundry detergent and conversations in the late night about adopting a cat together, except for real this time.

Dream sighs, and George knows that means he’s changed his mind again, so he tries his best to dilute the disappointment by opening his mouth to change the topic of conversation.

“I want to,” Dream starts, and George goes to tell him that it’s okay, because *they already spend so much time together anyways, and Dream probably wants his own space, and that’s fine.*

“You can tell me that’s not something you want to do,” is what comes out instead before he can

stop it.

The air feels hostile and thick around them and George curses himself for picking a fight right now out of all times.

“Sorry,” George follows it up with, watches with dismay as Dream shakes his head no. “I didn’t mean it like that, I’m sorry, just stressed and taking it out on you.”

“No,” Dream waves off. “You’re right. It’s—I’m being unfair to you.”

George isn’t ready for Dream to say it out loud, confront the reality of the situation. That they should start maybe separating their lives, because they’re too close and too volatile to exist in the same space. And George won’t be able to help himself, and they’ll fight, and go right back to how they were when they got into this mess.

“Dream, I’m being pushy,” George says with a laugh, but Dream holds up a hand to tell him to stop talking.

“No, you’re not,” Dream admits with a sigh. “You’ve got to sign the lease soon, I’m sure.”

George still has about three weeks, but he keeps quiet.

“George,” Dream starts, and he pauses like he’s looking for the right words to say. “I don’t—I want to move in with you. I just don’t know if it’s the best course of action.”

“Course of action,” George repeats, as his heart squeezes painfully in an attempt to go numb, anything but confront the fact that this crush is unrequited, and he’s ruined their friendship.

“We practically already live together,” Dream says, and George wants to melt to the floor and disappear, turn back the gears of some universal clock and undo this entire experience. “And I want to move in with you, but it would just be hard for me.”

It’s coming now, the finishing blow. He’s waiting for George to prompt him into giving it. George looks at him; his hands are folded and propped onto the table, and it feels like the roof is caving in all over again.

“I need some fresh air,” George blurts out, and he’s a coward for running but he doesn’t care, just needs to make it to the backyard. He undoes the lock with shaky hands. Dream reaches over him to lift the latch, and George throws the door open. He steps out onto the patio, tries to even out his breathing.

“I’m gonna miss this place,” George laughs. “And having you so close-by.”

It’s silent for a moment. Dream is standing so dangerously close behind him that he’s afraid he can see that George is trembling.

“I’m kind of one of the fastest things in existence,” Dream responds. “I can get to you so quick. Like you’d just need to tell me, and I’d be there in the blink of an eye.”

“What if I need to get to you?”

Dream thinks for a moment. “I’ll come get you to me.”

George rolls his eyes and laughs weakly as Dream comes around to stand in front of him.

“I really want to move in with you,” Dream starts again, and George is reaching a breaking point.

“Dream, don’t do this.”

The wind whistles around them, and George feels like the trees growing over the neighbour’s fence are inclining towards them, like the clouds have gotten heavy, like the universe itself is leaning in to watch the best thing George has ever had collapse in on itself.

“I’m sorry,” Dream finally says, shoulders slumping, and George knows that he can’t run from the inevitable anymore.

Maybe they can work this out, over here. Maybe if they talk to each other, then they can reach an agreement. Maybe George can have this, if he can just get over this, set the both of them free from these hellish feelings that have ruined everything. Because as long as Dream doesn’t know that he wants him, as long as he can keep hiding it, and maybe keep his emotions in check, he can still have this.

“George,” Dream repeats and George can’t look at him, not when he’s doing this.

He feels Dream hold onto both his hands and the touch feels scalding hot, especially when he knows the words that are to follow are going to burn him.

“I’m really sorry for doing this here,” Dream starts, voice decrescendoing near the end of the sentence. “But it’s killing me. I know it’s killing you too.”

You have no fucking idea, George thinks to himself numbly as he finally wills himself to look Dream in the eye.

“I know you didn’t sign up for this,” Dream continues, squeezing his hand in a way that’s so gentle that it makes George’s knees feel weak. “But I need—I don’t—you don’t have to say anything. It’s okay, I get it.”

George waits for him to continue, eyes flickering to the bridge of his nose for a brief moment, cortisol levels rising as his heart throws itself at the walls of his ribcage in a desperate attempt to get him to move, run, do anything but listen.

“But I’m so in love with you,” Dream’s voice cracks as he admits it, the first time George has heard him so small, so scared. “And I can’t do it. I can’t be there, I can’t sign a lease and play house and pretend everything’s okay.”

George’s mind runs circles around itself in an attempt to process this information and find the words to say.

“And I know you noticed,” Dream laughs bitterly. “Because you stopped being so—I don’t know. You talked to me so differently, like you wouldn’t even joke about dating me anymore, and then you started keeping me at arm’s length at work, and—I get it, I get why you would, but I just—I can’t. I can’t—”

“Dream,” George cuts him off, watches as Dream’s hands drop his, and instead travel to his own arms, rubbing them up and down in a manner that’s attempting to be comforting.

“Don’t,” Dream starts again, decidedly not finished. “It just sucks because like, when I first met you I had a crush on you, and then it went away, and we were friends for such a long time and I thought I beat it, and then we moved out here and it’s just *so fucking hard.*”

“Dream—”

“I tried so hard to get over you,” Dream breathes out, trembling now. “And I thought you being

distant would help, but it didn't. You just threw yourself into making all these fucking machines, and I thought it was because you didn't want to see me, and I got stupid."

"You're not stupid," George whispers, reaching out to place a hand on his shoulder, but Dream flinches backwards, like George's touch will turn him to stone.

"That's why I started doing shit without telling you," Dream admits, shaking out his hands. "I thought it would make you pay attention to me."

George has been stunned into silence by this confession, tongue heavy in his mouth as he contemplates what the right thing to do here is.

"And it almost got you killed," Dream decides, and George knows he has to intervene, but there isn't a single thing he thinks he could say right now that would fix all of this up.

"Dream—"

"I'm putting both of us in danger," Dream states, matter-of-factly, ashamed. "And I can't—especially not after you almost died, George. I gotta get my head screwed on straight, I need some space. Until then, I'm thinking about requesting a transfer to another squadron."

The words stab at George's stomach, betrayal eating away at him as he opens and closes his mouth multiple times, still unable to compute what the right thing to say here is.

"It's okay," Dream says quietly. "I'm sorry for springing this on you. I can go if you like."

Thinking feels impossible, especially in a case he had never anticipated being in because Dream wants him, and he's about to leave, and George has no idea what to do, what to say. He could invite him back inside, insist they talk, but Dream isn't going to listen to him. He's already starting to step backwards, perceiving the shock as rejection, and George has to do something, anything.

George throws caution to the wind, and takes the risk, reaching out to take Dream's face between both his hands and pulling him close. He stares at him for a moment in shock, disbelieving of his own actions as he wonders what possessed him to think this was a good idea. Dream stares back at him, wide eyed, before his eyes dip down to George's lips.

It happens fast.

George is trapped in the eye of the heat death of the universe; the milky way spinning into a tidal wave that swallows the stars whole, and *Dream is kissing him* in the backyard while it all happens. He feels arms wrap around his waist, pulling him closer as he melts into him, the world around them melting away into nothing but concept, because it feels like nothing is real in this space except Dream.

They pull apart, panting for breath, and George wants to say something, but it feels like the kiss has done nothing but distort his mental state even further.

So he kisses him again. It's gentler this time, before he rests his forehead against Dream's.

"Stay," George manages to whisper.

Dream looks at him like he's seeing him for the first time, and George's hands find themselves gripping desperately at the hem of his sweater. Dream grabs him and the next few movements are so quick that all George sees is a flash of the white of his living room walls, followed by the blur of mahogany of the stairs.

He ends up laying in bed, and Dream is hovering over him, kissing him like he has something to prove. They break apart and Dream holds out a hand, towards the entrance. George hears the bedroom door slam shut.

“There’s nobody here,” he informs Dream, who rolls his eyes as he holds up a hand towards the blinds next.

They fold closed.

“Well, I don’t plan on letting the whole neighbourhood know what we’re doing,” Dream informs him.

“After we made out in the backyard? Yeah, I’m sure they have no idea,” George bites back and Dream kisses him again to shut him up.

George sits up, back pressed against the headboard as Dream looks at him, a mix of emotions dancing in his eyes.

“What’s on your mind?” George asks softly this time, reaching out a hand to touch, to push the hair back off his forehead.

“We I don’t— what is this?”

George remembers that he didn’t even say it yet.

“Dream,” he starts. “I’m— I love you too.”

It’s a possibility he hadn’t even considered, mainly because he thought it would never happen. But it’s happening, and George is the most underprepared he’s ever been in his life. Lucky for him, neither has Dream, so they seem to be on the same page about this thing.

“Shut up,” Dream says in disbelief. “How did— I thought you hated me.”

George makes a noise of confusion. “How?”

“You just like— you stopped flirting with me as a joke, and then I thought you figured it out and didn’t want me ten feet near you, and then you just— I don’t know. You got distant.”

George feels guilty. “I didn’t mean to make you upset. I was just trying to protect myself.”

“It’s not your fault,” Dream admits. “I was— I started being difficult on purpose because I thought you were bored of me.”

“Bored of you?” George says it’s absurd, because it is. “I’m never bored of you, and I’ve spent practically every waking hour with you for years. I moved across the country for you!”

Dream thinks about this, and inhales. “I thought it didn’t mean anything.”

“Well, it didn’t at the time,” George says truthfully. “Actually— I don’t know. Maybe it did and I just hadn’t figured it out.”

“There’s a lot to figure out,” Dream says. “I just don’t— *you love me.*”

“I love you.”

Dream grins as he leans closer, hands leaning on the wall either side of George as he closes the

distance again, the kiss briefer this time.

“I love you too,” Dream says, placing his head on George’s chest.

George wraps his arms around him. “Are you going to move in with me?”

He’s sure that with anyone else, he’d have reservations about moving so quickly, but Dream isn’t most people.

“If you want me to,” Dream mumbles it into his shirt. “I want to, but I don’t—if it’s too fast, I can wait.”

“Half your clothes are in my drawer,” George tells him matter of factly. “Your toothbrush is in the bathroom, and you’re here all the time anyways. I think we’re past all of that.”

Dream nods, quiet again. They sit in silence for a few moments before he speaks again. “I just don’t want to mess this up.”

“You won’t,” George promises. “I won’t either.”

“How can you be sure?” Dream asks, craning his neck backwards to look at him. “George, I’m really—if we’re worse working together when we like each other, I don’t even want to see what we do now. Because if I’m in a situation where I *could* get injured and save something important, or get out safe and fuck over a case, I already know what you’re going to make me do.”

George doesn’t have anything to say in response because he knows it’s true. It dampens the mood, but he supposes it’s a conversation they should have before Monday rolls around again.

“Actually,” Dream decides, leaning up to kiss George again. “I don’t want to talk about it right now. I don’t want to think about work.”

George laughs in agreement, smiling down at him. “Yeah. Already has too much agency over our lives.”

“Way too much!” Dream parrots with enthusiasm. “Let’s talk about us.”

They spend the rest of the day in the kitchen again, George flipping through the recipe book he keeps in the second drawer, searching for something to do for dinner, while Dream sits at the counter and looks through the houses George is looking at moving into, providing commentary as he does.

When George settles on sheet pan quesadillas, and calls out to Dream for approval, Dream nods, not looking away from the screen.

“George,” he says disapprovingly, flipping the computer around so he can see. “This one’s your favourite? The kitchen island is made of soapstone.”

George bites back a smile as he spins around to the fridge. “They’re not that bad.”

He tries to picture Dream’s handwriting on the grocery list, can already hear him complaining about how George always leaves his jacket on the couch instead of hanging it up. He rolls his eyes as Dream reaches over him to take the mozzarella out, announces that he’ll shred it if George refries the beans, and then continues to berate him in his choice of countertop material. The shared laundry detergent seems marginally less terrifying.

Chapter End Notes

yooo they fuckididng. who clapped. i did!!!!
had a lot of fun building up to this point, always a great time getting to the lovers part
of idiot to lovers. very excited for the last chapter. just wanted to say a big thank you to
everyone that leaves encouraging comments either here or under my tweets or on my
curiouscat i usually try to stay away from discussing stuff in detail until the story is
over but. everyone playing along with my power trip where i said i was going to kill
george was very nice. thank u for entertaining me. i'm like a baby that you have to
entertain inorder to see it do the things you want it to do (write).
hope you liked it, would love to see your thoughts in the comments, and i'll see you in
the last one :)

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream resigns from George's squadron.

It's one of the toughest things he's ever had to sign off on, but he knows it's for the best. They finish up the paperwork in a conference room, requesting that everyone else gives them space. Dream is sitting across from him, picking at his nail beds while George stamps the top of the document with a seal of approval.

"So this is it?" Dream asks. "We're work-husband divorced?"

George rolls his eyes as he slides the paperwork across the desk, over to him again. "Shut up."

It's silent for a moment, as George thinks of the right thing to say.

"I really enjoyed working with you, George," Dream pronounces the words quietly, thoughtfully. "I'm sure Lieutenant Hawkins isn't even half as smart as you."

"He's not," George admits, leaning back in his chair to stretch. "But he's really old, so he has a thing for sending out people instead of drones for missions, which I'm sure you're pleased about."

Dream is biting back a smile, a poor attempt at protecting George's ego. "Oh. I'm sure I'll settle in then."

"You will," George agrees. "Just going to be weird, not having you. It's good I'm keeping Sapnap though."

"My next mission is to get him out of there too," Dream tells him. "If I work hard enough, maybe one day I can save everybody."

George throws the cap of the pen at his head, watches as Dream laughs and holds up a hand to stop it in midair.

"Now for the next batch of paperwork," George says, and Dream lights up, sitting up straighter. "Wow, never thought I'd see you be excited over paperwork."

Dream scoffs as George flips to the next booklet, the words *Workplace Relationship Disclosure Form* printed across the top in bold Times New Roman.

"I already filled out most of it," George says as he slides over the form. "There wasn't even that much, honestly, because technically neither of us hold a position of authority over the other."

"Thanks," Dream says as he takes it, scanning over the page briefly. "I forget sometimes, because you tend to go on power trips from your fucking desk."

"I don't!" George defends, and Dream guffaws in response.

"Yeah right, you don't," he starts, pitching his voice up higher. "*I'm the Sergeant, remind me of your position, Dream! You fucked up, Dream! It's unprofessional to joke around when I hold control over your life, Dream!*"

George throws the pen this time, but Dream just flicks his fingers to send it boomeranging back. When it hits him on the nose he winces, turning his head to the side for dramatics.

“George? Are you okay?”

George doesn’t answer, just hears the violent squeaking of a chair being pushed back, and then there’s a hand in his hair and another on his cheek.

“I’m so sorry, shit, fuck, are you okay? Can you see? George?”

George uncovers his eyes to glare at Dream, who’s kneeling beside him. “That’s how it fucking feels, asshole. Except instead of a nick on your eye, it’s a knife in your shoulder!”

“That was one time!”

Dream scolds him for faking it, and then goes as far as to kiss George on the nose like he’s some sort of child that needs that kind of attention after something as trivial as that, and then he presses his cold palms to his cheeks and begs every force in the universe to stop his cheeks from going red.

There’s something bittersweet blossoming inside of George’s chest, because he’s thrilled to finally have Dream the way he wants him, but the idea of being unaware of what he’s doing all the time is a little anxiety inducing. There’s going to be a learning curve to it, he’s sure, but judging from past experience, they don’t do too well together when they’re pent up and emotional.

“I’m going to go meet the Lieutenant,” Dream tells him as they walk out and drop the forms off to the file collector standing outside of the human resources office. “I’ll be back to take my things from your desk.”

“Are we going to go check out the house after?” George asks, and Dream sighs.

“I don’t like the vinyl flooring for the bedroom—” Dream starts, but he stops when he sees the pleading look in George’s eyes. “Okay, we’ll go, we’ll go.”

When George finally returns to his desk, where Sapnap is calibrating some girl’s suit, he sits down with a sigh.

“Work divorce finalized?” he asks, not even looking up from his computer.

“Stop calling it that,” George tells him as he leans over to see his progress.

Sapnap curses under his breath, mutters something about how *he probably lets Dream call it that*, before finally tearing his eyes away to smile at the girl. “All set.”

She asks him a question about the material as George continues to look over his work. With nothing looking offensively out of place, he nods, motioning for Sapnap to submit.

“We’re going to look at a house today,” George tells him as he sits down. “Do you wanna come?”

Sapnap shakes his head no furiously. “I’ll pass.”

“Why?” George asks with a frown. “You had so much fun last time!”

“No I didn’t,” Sapnap says firmly. “I don’t want to listen to you two, or anyone for that matter, talk about cabinet handles ever again.”

“It’s important,” George starts, but Sapnap throws his hands over his ears and squeezes his eyes shut in mock anguish, so he takes it as his cue to stop. “Alright, fine. You’re helping us move in though, yeah?”

Sapnap nods. “Oh yeah, for sure.”

When Dream comes back to their desk, holding two donuts in one hand and a third between his teeth, handing one off to Sapnap and holding the other one out in front of George for him to bite into, he can’t help but comply. He glances up and they lock eyes for a brief moment, watching as the corners crinkle as he smiles. Dream glances left, then right, to make sure nobody is watching before quickly pressing a powdered-sugar kiss to his forehead.

↔

The peace never lasts very long, because Dream reads an article about how couples that move in without treating it like a milestone tend to break up faster, and freaks out. As a result, there’s been an abundance of celebration around the house over the most mundane of things.

They wear suits and drink champagne in the living room the night they bring home a toaster.

George thinks that if he was still just Dream’s friend, then he would make fun of him for all of this. But clearly it means a lot to Dream, so he obliges. They end up celebrating everything; their first Ikea project, their first joint streaming service account.

“Living with you is a lot of fun,” George tells Dream honestly one night as they’re laying in bed.

“Yeah?” Dream asks in a soft voice, rolling over onto his side to look at him. “Why?”

“I never have to carry in the groceries,” George starts, inching closer, placing a hand over Dream’s stomach. “I can’t believe I didn’t think of having you telekinesis them in earlier.”

Dream rolls his eyes as he places his hand over George’s. “Okay, George.”

“Come closer,” Dream says in a hushed voice, pulling George onto his chest, adjusting the two of them.

George hums in acknowledgement, lost in his own thoughts. He had wanted this with Dream for so long that it very nearly doesn’t feel real. He feels like he’ll wake up tomorrow, in his own bed, in his old house, to a text from Dream asking why he’s late for work.

“I’ve liked you for so fucking long, it’s so weird to have you here,” Dream admits when George doesn’t say anything. “Ever since my dad brought you into the lab. But I tried not to get too attached because he’d never take anyone in to mentor for that long, *definitely* wouldn’t let me tell them about all of this. But I guess he liked you.”

George listens to the thrumming of his heart inside of his chest, waits for Dream to continue.

“I made a fucking fool of myself the first time I met you,” Dream laughs.

“I don’t remember it going like that,” George responds with a frown, to which Dream scoffs.

“I was stuttering and I almost tripped over myself, and then I told myself that you would be gone in a few months anyways so it didn’t matter. But then you got kept around, and I thought I got over it. Well, not really, but it was like— it’s one of those things— those feelings you just sort of manage it because it’s in the background, but then we moved out here.”

George reaches upwards to place a hand on Dream’s shoulder as he takes in the weight of what he’s saying.

“You moved across the country to be with me,” Dream says softly, hands brushing the hair from his eyes.

Of course I moved across the country for you, is what George thinks. *You’re the best thing to happen to me.*

“Well, yeah,” is what comes out of his mouth instead.

Dream exhales slowly, and George takes it as an opportunity to tip his head upwards and kiss him on the chin.

“You saved my life, in that house,” George says.

Dream’s grip on his waist tightens before he speaks. “Don’t.”

“You risked your own life while you did that,” George continues, as Dream squirms underneath him, like he can’t bear the attention.

George finds it hard to put his gratitude into words, and Dream, despite his need to gloat at every waking hour, doesn’t like to talk about it. Occasionally, he’ll participate in the conversation, when George brings it up, but only to correct a detail in his memory.

“That kind of stunt could have left you paralyzed, Dream,” George says the words to the crook of his neck before he presses his cheek to Dream’s collar.

“I know.”

A pause.

“You still did it,” George whispers, and Dream hums in agreement.

“Can’t exactly live without you,” Dream whispers, and George wants to drown in his sweatshirt, melt right into Dream’s skin and stay with him forever, as close as humanly possible.

“Idiot,” George whispers instead.

Dream seems to understand. They talk in hushed voices, even though there isn’t anyone in the house to hear them.

“What’s great about living with you is that they relaxed the security installations in the house,” George tells Dream, poking him in the ribs, watching as he squirms. “Because I have the world’s strongest man in my bed. Our bed.”

“And fastest,” Dream adds, before pausing to think. “And—I don’t know. Most telekinetic?”

“And the most humble,” George adds, to which Dream laughs.

“It’s not bragging if it’s factually correct.”

George supposes he's right. They lay there in comfortable silence for a little.

Dream huffs. "What do you mean *our* bed? I put it together. You were of no use."

"I'm trying to be cute," George huffs, so Dream laughs and presses a kiss into his hair in apology.

"You're *so* cute, baby."

George audibly gags. "*Baby.*"

"I used to call you that all the time as a joke," Dream raises his chin so he can tuck George's head underneath his own. "Now that we're *actually* dating, it's offensive to you?"

"It sounds corny when you're not making fun of it," George groans, fatigue suddenly falling over him. "Dream, I'm tired."

"Go to sleep, *baby.*"

George presses the cold bottom of his foot to Dream's ankle. Dream kicks back at him in retaliation before rolling over so that the two of them are laying on the bed, side to side.

"Gonna call you baby all the time now, even at work, even in front of Lieutenant," Dream starts, to which George groans.

"I hate dating you so much," George retaliates, but it comes out weak.

His eyes shut involuntarily as sleep begins to overpower him, but he's sure that Dream is grinning at him in that self-satisfactory manner, confident that he's won whatever that exchange was. George lets him think it, because that's what relationships are about, he supposes. Compromises, and the incessant urge to bother the other individual.

It's everything he's ever wanted, and then some.

↔

On a Wednesday afternoon, a hospital bed being pushed by two doctors goes barreling through the hallway at the same time George is making photocopies. He thinks nothing of it at first, walking over to his desk where Sapnap is waiting for him with a worried look on his face.

Sapnap says something about a fire. The room spins.

"It's Dream, but they won't— they won't let anyone in to see him," Sapnap says quietly.

This is exactly what he was afraid of. He doesn't know who the hell authorized this, but they'll have hell to pay from George once he's sure that Dream is fine.

"I don't care," George retaliates, furious, but Sapnap reaches out and stops him from storming off.

“George, you can’t go see him as his Commander anymore,” Sapnap reminds him. “I already argued with the Lieutenant, because he barely knows Dream at this point, not enough to know what to do in these situations.”

“Call the doctor,” George says, already reaching over for the phone to page him. “They know. They know I need to be there.”

“It doesn’t matter, it’s not protocol,” Sapnap reminds George, who sits down in frustration, pulling at the roots of his hair. “Hey, George, breathe. He’s going to be okay, he’s with the doctor, no life threatening anything.”

“How did you find out about this?” George asks, and Sapnap motions to George’s computer, which is unlocked.

“Was looking for a file, but then the email to you popped up. I wasn’t going to look, I swear, the subject line just had Dream’s name in it, so—”

“That’s totally okay,” George waves off, tearing through the lines of the email in search for some loophole.

Just to inform you and expected full recovery and only family members allowed in the hospital room flash by his eyes and he hits his fist on the desk in an attempt to release the pent up rage in his belly.

“Okay, George, breathe,” Sapnap repeats. “You freaking out isn’t going to make Dream feel better. He’s going to recover, we’ll go out there and try again with the hospital staff in three minutes.”

George nods, trying his best to center himself. He doesn’t trust himself to speak, to not take it out on Sapnao when he’s being the rational one here. He closes his eyes momentarily, reminds himself that Dream is okay, and that he can go see him as soon as they’re authorized to.

When they reach the door to the medical clinic, he’s met with a nurse who he recognizes. She frowns for a moment, before her eyes flicker to his name badge and she seems to remember who he is.

“You can go in,” she tells George, before apologetically looking at Sapnap. “I’m afraid you can’t get clearance.”

Sapnap motions for George to go without him. He stomps down the corridor leading to the hospital room, making his presence very known. When he arrives, he sees Dream hooked up to a monitor, wrapped in blue bandages as a doctor and the Lieutenant stand over him.

He wants nothing more than to pick a fight, to demand answers and take Dream back under his leadership because nobody here, it turns out, had bothered to read the report he’d written about Dream’s capacities. Fire being a no had been in the third fucking line, bolded.

But he knows how important this is to Dream, so he keeps his mouth closed, ignoring the other officers as he stands at the bedside.

“He’s going to be okay,” the doctor says, not looking up from his clipboard. “Minor burns, shouldn’t leave much of a scar.”

George’s stomach turns inside out. “What happened?”

The Lieutenant is speaking to him, but none of the words compute. He looks over at Dream’s

hands laid delicately at his sides, and feels even angrier when he sees that they're wrapped in blue bandages as well.

"What happened to his hands?" George asks as evenly as he can manage.

"Gasoline spill," the Lieutenant starts, and George imagines what it would be like to put his hand in a fist and clock him in the jaw.

"Are you aware of his sensitivity to fire?" George asks him, and the room turns tense as the doctors begin to slowly shuffle away from him.

Everyone on the medical team was *very* aware of Dream's sensitivity to fire. It appears that the Lieutenant hadn't bothered to read any of the briefings George had sent him, and he wonders how people that careless can maintain their positions, can be expected to be trusted with the organization's, the world's most powerful superhuman, and the anger escalates from a simmer to a boil.

"George."

It's forgotten the moment Dream speaks, because George is all over him, hand to his forehead, the other to his cheek.

"My temperature's on the screen over there, idiot," Dream laughs hoarsely, motioning towards the vitals monitor before wincing.

George gets put on autopilot; escorted to the side of the room as the doctors crowd around Dream again, before someone pulls George out.

"George," Donavan's voice speaks this time. "We need to meet in my office."

George glances at the hospital bed. "Can it wait?"

A hand is placed on his shoulder, and he blinks, and he's somehow in Donavan's office, sat on the familiar brown couch chair.

"I think it's best if you take the next few weeks off."

George blinks at him. That can't be right. "Pardon?"

Donavan sighs, before speaking again. "These past few weeks have been... less than ideal. With Dream injured, and your... changed relationship to him, we think it's best if he's placed in your care for the next little while. Until he recovers. Then, we'll resume normal operations."

Donavan pauses. "There's still quite a bit that needs to be done around here, in terms of screening our staff."

George nods, before thinking about the implications of that.

"We reread your report about Dream earlier today, and there was no mention of fire sensitivity there," Donavan starts. "Which is odd, because I remember it being there distinctly."

His heart beats around violently in his chest.

"The Lieutenant is more careful than this, but he prefers print materials to digital things," Donavan continues. "Which means that it could have been switched out in an attempt to sabotage. It is beginning to get unsafe here."

George nods, mind racing around in circles as he thinks of what to do.

He's informed that his case files will be sent straight to his home, that the security department will be informed that they have the master key to the system, but that the real master key will be given to George in case of emergency.

"Odd times," Donavan finishes with a nervous laugh. "Minimizing how often you go outside would also be beneficial to you, as well as making sure you take the underground exit."

George agrees and thanks him. Before he heads outside to pack up his things, he turns around in the doorway and looks Donavan in the eye. "I'm taking Sapnap with us."

It isn't a question. Donavan looks surprised, but doesn't protest.

George waits at the office until late in the evening, when Dream is finally ready to be discharged. Dream smiles at him lopsidedly from the wheelchair as he's carried and placed in the passenger seat of the car, while George stares ahead and blinks the tears out of his eyes.

They take the underground route home, and George tries his best not to agonize, because this isn't about him, it's about Dream. When they arrive home, Dream insists he's fine to walk, but George insists on wheeling him in.

"Some day, huh?" Dream jokes, but George can see that he's physically shaking. "The bandages are supposed to come off in about an hour, they said not to keep them on longer or the skin will heal raised."

George swallows and nods, helping him onto the couch. "I'm so fucking sorry about this." "Not your fault," Dream insists. "It was—it's alright. I'm okay. Still in one piece."

George pulls a couch cushion from the loveseat for Dream to prop his head up against, sits on the floor beside him and holds his hand. "Tell me what happened."

Dream says that the mission was supposed to be a quick ordeal, but he had to get through this narrow hallway with barrels of gasoline to get out. Unfortunately, some motion sensor went off, and everything was on fire before he knew it.

"I just kept running," Dream laughs, rubbing the back of his neck with a bandaged hand. "But they said I shouldn't use my telekinesis for the next month. I think I'll listen."

George swallows and nods, before standing up to kiss his forehead. "Okay."

"I'm fine," Dream insists, picking at the ends of one of his bandages. "Everything is more than fine. It was really—I still am, really scared, but I'll be fine."

George doesn't believe him but keeps quiet. He spoon feeds Dream dinner, excuses himself to the bathroom to cry when staring at the bandages gets too much. When it comes time to peel them back, he winces, anticipating the scarring to be much worse than it actually ends up.

"I have a friend who works with scar minimizing laser treatment, if you'd like to go see her," George whispers, running his thumb over the one star shaped patch over Dream's shoulder before pressing a kiss to it. "If you'd like it gone."

Dream yawns. "It's okay. Barely hurts anymore."

George thinks the rate at which Dream heals is both the biggest blessing, and the worst curse, because he's always afraid that one day it'll stop working the way it's supposed to.

"We've been asked to stay home for a few weeks, while your telekinesis recovers," George tells him gently. "I'll be working from home, and Sapnap will be working from here too."

"That's one positive to this whole situation," Dream sighs, and George can't even look at him right now without feeling something guilty swell inside of his chest.

The rest of the evening is quiet; it isn't the first of these occurrences, and it definitely isn't the last. George wonders how much longer it will have to be like this; Dream occasionally thrashing around in the bed beside him before George manages to soothe him back to sleep.

The next morning, Dream makes an announcement over breakfast, with dark circles underneath his eyes. "I'm going to therapy."

George sets up an office for him with the old desk in the basement so he can have some privacy, and listens to Dream recount parts of the session over dinner.

Things are better here; in their bubble, away from the chaos of the agency. Things were simpler when it was smaller, but George supposes it was all to be expected. He worries a lot these days; about Dream, about Sapnap, about the uncertainty of how they'll return and be guaranteed their safety. When he climbs into bed next to Dream in the evenings, watches as Dream scrolls mindlessly through pictures of cats, occasionally telling George that *we should get this one*, it feels like everything might turn out okay.

◆◆

The office throws a party when they return; balloons taped to the conference room walls, and George's squadron practically tackles him in a hug. The Lieutenant tells George that he wants to implement more of his technology into his squadron too, a guilty look in his eyes. George apologizes for yelling at him, and they shake hands.

He's in the break room, rinsing out a dish to place in the dishwasher, when he's pulled backwards by an invisible force, back colliding with someone's chest.

"Hey, haven't seen you around here," a familiar voice says in his ear and George scoffs and rolls his eyes before looking around to make sure nobody's looking.

When he's sure the coast is clear, he wraps an arm around Dream's neck, and pulls him in for a kiss. Dream tells him about the new Thai restaurant that's opened up downtown, how they should consider going tonight. George lets him fiddle with the radio as he pulls out of the parking lot.

They make a reservation on the phone, get sidetracked at home before they realize what time it is. George is still pulling one shoe onto his foot as they make it into the car again. When they arrive and he tries to open the car door Dream locks all of them, motions for him to wait. He watches Dream walk all the way around, making a show out of opening the door for George, bowing down dramatically as he motions for him to come forward.

"Thanks," George tells him, but he doesn't bite back the smile this time, feels his cheeks go red as Dream beams down at him.

“You are very welcome.”

George offers Dream his arm, which he gladly takes. They walk in together.

Chapter End Notes

thank you all so much for reading - i had a lot of fun writing this! they r in domestic bliss because they r just. little introverts in love. good for them.

thank you again for reading! hope to see you around :)
- angelbeachcat

End Notes

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